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5 April 2019

Mr David Brandon-Bravo  
Headteacher  
Parkfields Middle School  
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Dunstable  
Bedfordshire  
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Dear Mr Brandon-Bravo

### **No formal designation inspection of Parkfields Middle School**

Following my visit with David Turner, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 27 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for pupils at the school.

### **Evidence**

We scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We reviewed assessment information, attendance and behaviour records, improvement plans and minutes of governing body meetings. We met with you, other members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and four other governors, and a group of pupils.

We made visits to classrooms to observe learning in all year groups and scrutinise pupils' work across a range of subjects. All of these visits took place with school leaders. My colleague made a more detailed scrutiny of pupils' work in English and mathematics. We observed pupils' behaviour and gathered their views on the school when visiting lessons and at lunchtime. We considered the 52 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and a letter from the parents of a pupil currently attending the school.

## **Context**

Parkfields Middle School is smaller than the average-sized middle deemed secondary school. Pupils join the school in Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much lower than the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is smaller than in most schools. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is above average and the proportion of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan is in the highest 20% nationally. There is a specialist unit for pupils with hearing impairment located in the school. Pupils attending this unit are on roll at the school. A significant number of pupils for whom Parkfields Middle School is not their local school attend the school. The school was judged to be outstanding at its full inspection in May 2012. The most recent inspection of the school in July 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, judged that the school continued to provide a high quality of education.

## **Main findings**

Leaders and governors have ensured that the school continues to provide a high quality of education. Together you have maintained a culture of high aspirations for all. Pupils respond admirably to adults' high expectations of achievement and behaviour. As a result, pupils make strong and sustained progress in the full range of subjects. Almost all pupils attend regularly and behave exceptionally well. All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agree that their children are taught well, make good progress and are well cared for. Pupils' comments to us such as, 'My school is my family,' and, 'They support you through tough times,' reflect the caring, supportive atmosphere and strong sense of community that is evident in the school.

Leadership at all levels is highly effective. Governors are knowledgeable and experienced, and play a full role in setting the vision and future direction for the school. They have a comprehensive understanding of the school's many strengths and the priorities for improvement. The governing body checks on leaders' work regularly and make full use of available information to provide appropriate challenge and support. Governors have a detailed knowledge of how leaders use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and the impact that this has on achievement and attendance. They check that leaders use Year 7 catch-up funding efficiently and that it helps pupils to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics. Governors check regularly that the provision for pupils with SEND supports these pupils to make strong progress in their learning, personal development and independence.

Leaders continually bring about improvements, even where practice is already of a high quality. You, working with senior leaders and governors, have accurately identified those areas that could be even better. You have carefully considered

actions in place to achieve your priorities for improvement. Subject leaders share, and are fully supportive of, senior leaders' aims. Subject leaders carry out thorough and regular checks on the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. They use information from these checks to ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs and develops the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils need to be successful in their learning. You ensure that teachers and subject leaders can share ideas about what works particularly well and observe colleagues using these in the classroom, both at Parkfields and in other schools.

You have sustained the strong transition arrangements noted at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils make an excellent start to their time in the school. Leaders use external assessments alongside information from feeder schools to identify accurately pupils' starting points before they join the school. Teachers use this information to plan sequences of learning that are carefully matched to pupils' capabilities and prior knowledge and capitalise on pupils' eagerness to learn.

Teachers plan engaging activities that give pupils many opportunities to practise skills and consolidate and deepen their understanding. Pupils apply what they know in different situations and build upon their knowledge. For example, pupils in a Year 8 science lesson confidently used their skills of scientific investigation and knowledge of energy transfers and electric current to investigate the best direction in which to place a solar cell on a building. Many pupils attain high standards in a range of subjects by the end of Year 8 because of the consistently impressive progress that they make over their time in the school.

Pupils make at least good, and often better, progress from the start of Year 5 to the end of Year 6 due to highly effective teaching. Leaders have successfully promoted reading to raise achievement further and support pupils in accessing the wider curriculum. Pupils read every day in school and teachers check that they are reading texts that provide the right level of challenge. Teachers help pupils to develop strategies that support their deduction and inference skills. Competitions, such as 'book bingo', are used to encourage pupils to read at home and pupils say the school library is used often. Pupils' achievement in reading at the end of key stage 2 has increased over the past three years and in 2018, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standard was above the national average.

Mathematics teaching is highly effective. Teachers plan activities that help pupils of different abilities to become secure in their knowledge and understanding and use what they have learned in different contexts. In a Year 5 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils could confidently explain how they were using their knowledge of place value, multiplication and division and equivalent fractions to solve problems involving percentages. Teachers' probing questioning and precise guidance help pupils to develop their ability to reason and solve problems. Pupils make strong and sustained progress in mathematics over their time in the school.

Leaders acted decisively when improvements in pupils' achievement in writing in

key stage 2 did not happen quickly enough. They ensured that teachers' expectations of pupils' writing are equally high in all subjects. Pupils learn to write for different purposes and audiences and do so in subjects such as history and geography, but not at the expense of learning the important skills and knowledge in these subjects. The technical aspects of writing are taught particularly well. Pupils apply these skills consistently in their writing. Consequently, pupils make substantial progress in their writing skills over their time in the school. However, boys' progress in writing in Year 5 and Year 6, although strong, does not yet match that of girls in the school.

Staff share your belief that there is no cap on what pupils can achieve. Adults' expectations of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are as high as they are for other pupils. Pupils with hearing impairments are integrated fully into the school community and access the whole curriculum. Precisely focused teaching and support enable pupils with SEND to make very strong progress from their starting points and make notable gains in their personal development and independence. Leaders ensure that barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils are accurately identified. Leaders closely monitor the carefully targeted actions taken to support individual pupils and hold teachers closely to account for the achievement of this group. Disadvantaged pupils make the same strong progress as other pupils with similar starting points.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their exemplary behaviour. Pupils said that the faultless behaviour that we observed when visiting lessons is typical. Pupils listen attentively and respectfully to others. They are polite, friendly and welcoming, both to visitors and pupils who are new to the school. Pupils collaborate well to support one another's learning and socialise amicably. Almost all responses on Parent View echoed pupils' views about behaviour. School records confirm that serious behavioural incidents are rare. Pastoral leaders provide support for individuals who find it hard to make the correct behaviour choices, which results in marked improvements in behaviour.

Pupils rarely miss a day at school. Absence rates have been consistently below the national average since the previous inspection. However, leaders noted that there was an increase in absence in 2018 and strengthened the already rigorous systems for monitoring absence. Heads of year work closely with pastoral support assistants to check on the attendance of individuals and look for patterns in absence. Where necessary, they work with the local authority education welfare officer to improve pupils' attendance. Their systematic checking and swift action have resulted in absence reducing for all pupils and for all pupil groups. However, disadvantaged pupils still have higher absence rates than other pupil groups in the school.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Pupils told us that they feel safe in the school. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View agree. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that teachers quickly resolve problems. Pupils spoke about how and why they learn about other

cultures. They have a mature understanding of tolerance, difference and equality. This contributes strongly to the harmonious atmosphere that permeates the school. Pupils learn about a variety of risks through life skills lessons, assemblies and visits from external organisations. Pupils have a highly developed awareness of how to stay safe when working online.

Governors make sure that leaders carry out thoroughly, and accurately record, all the checks required to ensure that adults are suitable to work in school. You ensure that all staff receive appropriate and regular training to spot the signs that pupils are at risk of harm, including the risks of radicalisation and extremism. As a result, adults know how and when to pass on concerns and have the confidence to do so. When necessary, the designated safeguarding leader passes concerns swiftly to external agencies, so that pupils and their families get the support that they need promptly.

### **External support**

The school is part of the Harlington Area Schools Partnership (HAST). You work with other schools in the partnership to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments and to support transition between schools in HAST. The local authority safeguarding officer provided training for staff at the start of the academic year. Leaders work with other schools to provide support and this has helped subject leaders in developing further their knowledge and skills.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve further boys' achievement in writing, so that it matches that of girls by the end of Year 6.
- Evaluate and, if necessary, refine the actions taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that their attendance is at least as good as that of all pupils nationally.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**