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Mike Price  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Price

### **Short inspection of Meadows School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 2016 with Andrew Hogarth, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in October 2012.

### **This school continues to be good.**

Your leadership has engendered a strong bond between staff, all of whom continually seek ways to improve the education pupils receive at the school. You have instilled a culture where most staff feel valued. You strive to provide them with equal opportunities to develop their professional skills and to make a contribution to school improvement. Subsequently, staff are committed to your aspirations for the school and are ambitious for pupils to achieve well. Admirably, you have been sharply focused on developing future leaders from within your school. You have identified talent and nurtured staff to blossom into budding leaders who add to the capacity of the school to improve further.

Because you know the strengths and areas for future development so well, you have driven school improvement and kept your eye on what needs to be accomplished. Consequently, ably supported by your leadership team, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have worked hard to make sure that pupils come to school every day and that the importance of good attendance is communicated effectively to pupils, parents and carers. You have demonstrated concern and dogged determination to help pupils who have too many days off school. You are acutely aware that pupils are vulnerable when they are not in school and you are working with local authorities to support pupils at risk. Despite this, attendance is currently below the national average for special schools, although there are recent signs that attendance is improving.

Leaders know that this needs to be an aspect of the school's work that continues to strengthen. Recent changes to the way that pupils' attendance is recorded when pupils attend alternative placements should have a positive impact on attendance figures. In addition, leaders recognise the benefit of increasing their expertise and skills in promoting good attendance and by working in collaboration with parents and carers.

Pupils who attend your school have experienced disrupted education in the past and some have missed long periods of schooling. When pupils arrive at your school, they find it difficult to manage their behaviour and most are disaffected by their previous educational experience. An exceptionally high proportion of pupils join your school at different times during the year into all age groups. You and your staff make a significant difference to pupils' lives by working with them to develop positive feelings of self-worth and by providing them with the strategies and resilience to manage their own emotions more effectively. Your staff are excellent role models to pupils in their care. Pupils verbalise the difference that being at your school has made to their lives and know that they are developing personal qualities that will help them be responsible citizens in the future. You have high expectations about pupils' behaviour. Sometimes, pupils, especially those new to the school, display highly challenging behaviour, resulting in a higher proportion of fixed-term exclusions than you would like. The number of fixed-term exclusions dramatically reduces as pupils become immersed in the school's culture. Nonetheless, you are determined to reduce the proportion of fixed-term exclusions by continuing to seek ways to support the pupils in your care.

The needs of pupils entitled to support through pupil premium funding are exceptionally well met and most pupils make greater than expected progress. This additional funding given by the government is allocated effectively and analysed thoroughly to make sure that any interventions are having an impact on pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils who are disadvantaged, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve well. Most-able pupils aspire and eloquently communicate the importance of education to help them achieve their dreams. Work is matched accurately to their needs so that they are challenged to apply what they know in a range of ways and deepen their understanding of concepts in a range of subjects. School leaders have been highly creative in the way they spend funding available to them, including purchasing cameras to enable pupils to record memories and produce journals, and through purchasing laptops for pupils to complete research linked to course requirements. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding who attend your school is well below the national average. As a result, you receive very limited funding. Nonetheless, your work to support disadvantaged pupils, including pupils who are in the care of the local authority, is commendable and, as a result, pupils thrive.

You and your staff have worked effectively to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection. Writing is taught well and the attainment of pupils in writing, including that of boys, has risen. Subject leaders have responded imaginatively to the challenge of engaging boys in writing by introducing creative ways of inspiring boys to write. This is beginning to pay dividends. You know that still more work needs to

be done to raise standards in writing and that providing pupils with more opportunities to write in a wide range of subjects would help to achieve this. Strategies to improve pupils' reading, and in particular to strengthen pupils' phonics skills, have had noteworthy positive results. Pupils quickly begin to read fluently and confidently to an audience and can identify key features within reading text, such as personification and alliteration. Pupils who have received additional support to help them read are justifiably proud of their accomplishments in reading and are better equipped for their future lives as a result.

You have very ambitious expectations of how well all pupils will achieve while they are at the school and you have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning and the way that assessment information is used to help you achieve this. You have ensured that leaders and managers are now equipped with the skills they need to make informed judgements about the quality of teaching throughout the school, taking into account how well pupils are achieving. Leaders undertake a wide variety of activities that help them to monitor and support teachers more effectively to improve their practice. Teachers are reflective and welcome the opportunities they are now being given to observe colleagues teaching so that they can learn from each other. Thus, the quality of teaching has improved across the school and additional adults support pupils' learning effectively. Therefore, pupils' progress has also increased. However, the school's own marking policy is not consistently implemented to make certain that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.

You have designed a curriculum that enables you to provide experiences that are bespoke to each pupil's and student's needs. Pupils and students have access to a combination of academic and practical opportunities provided by the school, and learn off site at various colleges and alternative provisions, all of which are registered with the Department for Education. You systematically check that the quality of learning that pupils and students receive in off-site alternative provision is rigorously monitored to make certain that pupils and students are safe and making strong progress. As a result, pupils and students are engaged in learning when previously they were not and consequently they experience success. They are developing healthy attitudes and understand the value of education for their future lives.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that a culture of safeguarding pupils has cascaded throughout the school. Positive relationships underpin this critical aspect of the school's work and therefore pupils are surrounded by adults who care deeply for them.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong emphasis on well-being throughout the school's work, underpinned by thoughtful attention to ensuring that pupils develop British values through the curriculum and through effective social, emotional, spiritual and cultural experiences. For example, pupils' homework is based upon this area of pupils' development.

Leaders have been dogged in their determination to ensure that pupils at risk from harm are identified and receive additional support from other professionals when needed. Thorough checks are made on staff and other adults when they work or volunteer at the school. All staff and governors are trained in child protection procedures that are updated regularly. Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after. The vast majority of parents agree with this view. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online and know the dangers of inappropriate texting. Pupils are able to talk openly about extremism and radicalisation and how to maintain healthy relationships with others.

## **Inspection findings**

- You have instilled a culture of high expectations that has cascaded throughout the school and consequently leaders, including governors, are driven to continually improve the school. All staff are keen to make sure that the school keeps on providing the best possible experience for all pupils.
- Leaders know the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to make it even better. You focus unambiguously on areas that need developing and you make sure that these are clearly communicated through the school improvement plan, to which all staff make a positive contribution.
- Senior and middle leaders are taking increasing responsibility to forge improved standards in the subjects and areas for which they are responsible. They are undertaking leadership training to help them improve their ability to impact on the strategic development of the whole school. You are rightly keen for these enthusiastic, emerging leaders to embed their roles so that they are able to accelerate school improvement.
- You and your team have worked hard to implement an assessment system that tracks the progress and achievement of pupils from their various starting points. You carefully baseline pupils' ability when they start at the school so you know precisely what they can do and understand. Teachers use this information to carefully plan the next steps in pupils' learning. Least-able pupils are identified quickly and interventions are put in place to help them make strong progress and engage in learning.
- Pupils make good progress from their various starting points because the quality of teaching over time and effective communication between staff during transitions between key stages and year groups ensure that progress is built upon year on year.
- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Their learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. Work in books and observations in lessons evidence the good progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have developed links with local grammar schools to make certain that the most able pupils reach the standards of which they are capable.

- Teachers plan lessons that engage and motivate pupils and meet the needs of all pupils, including the least able, the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. In mathematics, for example, some pupils learn to partition while other pupils grapple with algebraic equations. Teachers commonly ask searching questions that deepen pupils' understanding. In a food technology lesson, pupils ably answered questions about the function of egg components, such as the yolk, air cell and shell membrane, while making an egg bap.
- The curriculum for pupils in key stages 2 and 3 allows teachers to focus on filling gaps in pupils' learning that have been accumulated prior to their arrival at the school. Regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress and achievement ensure that the right strategies are in place to support learners who are falling behind.
- Post-16 students attend a range of colleges, such as Hadlow College, and placements, such as White Rocks Farm, that enhance their experiences and increase the accredited outcomes to which they have access. Leaders work hard to make certain that students' pathways allow them to follow their interests and build on their strengths. Furthermore, students have numerous opportunities to develop life skills that help them to become more independent, for instance by using public transport and reading timetables, and through using money and tending to their own laundry.
- Pupils quickly make progress and follow personalised pathways to achieve a wide range of accredited outcomes that reflect their ability. By the time students leave the school, they have achieved a range of GCSEs, AQA unit awards, entry-level certificates and BTEC qualifications. This is particularly noteworthy as some pupils attend the school for a very short period of time. Nearly all pupils go on to participate in further education or employment. The school works hard to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged academically. As a result, a small number of students have successfully left the school and gone on to access degree courses at university.
- Pupils enjoy being given responsibilities such as being members of the school council. Pupils learn how to express their views confidently and these opportunities provide them with valuable skills for the future. Pupils feel that their views are important and that they are well prepared for the future, expressing, 'You can't knock this place.'
- The number of behavioural incidents and pupils' use of derogatory language linked to race and sexuality have dramatically decreased since the last academic year. Pupils have individual targets that help them to focus on which aspects of their behaviour need to improve and are rewarded for the progress they make. During this visit, staff consistently applied the school's expectations regarding appropriate behaviour and conduct of pupils. A small number of staff feel that the school's behaviour policy is not adhered to unfailingly by all members of staff.
- The school provides effective therapeutic support to help pupils who struggle to manage their emotions and behaviour on their own. The school's holistic approach to pupils' care enables pupils to develop respect for themselves and others, and prepares them well for the future. You have ensured that your staff's expertise is shared with other schools to help them manage pupils' behaviour more effectively.

- Most parents are pleased with the school and are positive about how happy their children are, that their children feel safe and how well their children are cared for. Most rightly feel that their children are well taught and that they receive valuable information about the progress their children are making.
- The governing body makes a challenging and supportive contribution to the school. Governors understand the nature of their strategic responsibilities and seek out ways to check the quality of the school's work for themselves. They have a strong regard for the safety and well-being of both pupils and staff. They undertake training to make sure that they are better equipped and skilled to undertake their roles and ensure that staff do the same.
- You have been open to support offered to the school from the school improvement partner and you say that the support has made a positive difference. You have particularly welcomed the emergent collaboration with other schools. Staff say that they would value even more opportunities to develop partnerships with other schools to share good practice so that all aspects of the school are improved further.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- remain focused on improving pupils' achievement in writing by providing them with ample opportunities to practise and enhance their writing skills in a wide range of subjects
- continue to work alongside parents and other professionals to bring attendance in line with, or above, the national average for special schools
- persist in seeking ways to support pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour when they initially arrive at the school so that the number of, and need for, fixed-term exclusions continues to diminish
- make certain that the school's policies and procedures are consistently implemented by all staff
- further develop partnerships and collaborations with local schools to share good practice, thereby strengthening the capacity of the school to improve further.

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

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we visited classes across all key stages with you and other senior leaders. We met with you, other senior leaders (one of whom is the designated safeguarding lead), the special educational needs coordinator and five members of the governing body. We also met with a group of staff who represented a breadth of roles within the school. We scrutinised a range of pupils' work. We took account of six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and two parents' written comments. We also spoke to a parent at the start of the school day. We met two groups of pupils formally and talked to them when in lessons. In addition, we considered 18 responses made on the online questionnaire specifically for pupils. We took account of the 16 responses to the staff survey. We spoke with an alternative provider to consider its views about the school. We analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including the school improvement plan, behaviour and attendance records, information about pupils' achievement, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. Prior to the start of the inspection, we looked at information available on the school's website. We also discussed your own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school with you.