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Mr Phil Bevan  
Principal  
Devizes School  
The Green  
Devizes  
Wiltshire  
SN10 3AG

Dear Mr Bevan

### **Short inspection of Devizes School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019 with Paul Nicholson, 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 June 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you took up post in April 2016, you have raised the expectations of staff and pupils. You are ably supported by other senior leaders, who share your ambition to improve outcomes for all pupils. Consequently, leaders have implemented successful strategies to improve behaviour and the quality of teaching.

As part of this work, you have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils' progress in mathematics is now in line with the national average and comparable with other subjects in the school. The quality of teaching in the sixth form has also improved and is enabling students to make progress that is in line with the national average. Pupils in different subjects across the school are more consistently acting on advice from teachers to improve their work.

Leaders at all levels are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. Middle leaders, governors and representatives of the multi-academy trust (MAT), to which the school belongs, are united by a common purpose. They 'pull together' to implement whole-school strategies for improvement. Nearly all staff who responded to the survey issued during the inspection agreed that they feel proud to work at the school. They also agreed that leaders do all they can to ensure the school has a motivated, well-respected and effective workforce.

The school has benefited from the support provided by the MAT. Staff now work

closely with colleagues from other trust schools to improve the transition from primary to secondary school. This partnership has helped staff to raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve when they join the school in Year 7. Moderation activities across trust schools are also helping staff to become more accurate in their assessment. Furthermore, the trust provides invaluable financial and human resource (HR) support to the school. This enables leaders to concentrate on raising standards.

Governors have adjusted well to changes in their roles and responsibilities following the school becoming part of the MAT. They continue to raise the level of challenge directed at leaders and take full advantage of training that helps them become more effective in their work. Now that the MAT takes responsibility for finance, HR and the estate, governors focus their efforts on teaching, pupils' welfare and achievement.

The school is a welcoming, inclusive place where pupils learn to become tolerant, accepting young people. They are polite, articulate and personable. Pupils are well behaved and move in an orderly way around the school. Leaders' implementation of the 'disruption-free learning' system has significantly improved behaviour. This is notable in lessons and during social time. Pupils who spoke with inspectors reported that they valued their school experience, in large part because of the positive relationships that they share with staff. One pupil in key stage 4 said, 'All pupils are treated equally.' Another pupil told the lead inspector, 'I respect [staff] because they respect me.'

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of safeguarding and leaders' actions to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. We also considered the suitability of the curriculum and whether absence and exclusions were reducing. These lines of enquiry are considered below, under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings', where they have not already been referred to.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The designated safeguarding lead has clear oversight of the systems and processes in place to protect children. She coordinates a wider team which understands its roles and responsibilities well. All members of the wider safeguarding team have received enhanced training, reflecting their responsibilities, and they communicate frequently to discuss any concerns that arise.

All staff have been trained in child-protection matters and understand the need to be vigilant. They know who to speak to and what to do should they have concerns about a child. Referrals are passed to the designated safeguarding team, which acts swiftly to resolve issues. Referral files are well organised and contain the necessary information. They record chronologies of events, external agency involvement and actions taken to resolve issues. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are up to date, comprehensive and rigorous.

Nearly all pupils who responded to the survey that was issued during the inspection reported that they feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors said they feel safe, in part because the behaviour of pupils had improved. They also felt that they could share any concerns they have with members of staff.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have prioritised the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. They recognise that achievement for this group of pupils over time has been too low. Consequently, these pupils now have a higher profile among staff. In lessons, staff are applying strategies and providing support to enable these pupils to make better progress.
- Staff use pupil premium funding effectively to increase disadvantaged pupils' engagement with school and boost achievement. For example, it is funding a scheme to improve pupils' reading in Year 7. Additional funding is also enabling staff to implement a greater range of strategies to tackle absence.
- The quality and presentation of disadvantaged pupils' work are comparable to the work of their peers. Inspectors observed disadvantaged pupils of different abilities participating in class discussion and engaging in their learning. The work in books showed that they are as keen to act on the advice of their teachers and improve their work as their peers. The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils are closing. However, leaders acknowledge that there is further work to do.
- Pupils benefit from a curriculum which is broad and largely tailored to their interests. Staff work closely with primary colleagues to devise a key stage 3 curriculum that builds on the work of key stage 2. Staff are adapting the curriculum in Year 9 to provide pupils with more choice before they choose their options and begin key stage 4. This 'try-before-you-buy' approach is helping pupils to make more informed option choices. Year 10 and 11 pupils who spoke with the lead inspector reported that they are happy with their option choices and had a range from which to choose.
- However, too few pupils choose to study a language in key stage 4, and the achievement of pupils who do study a language has been too low over time. Leaders are currently considering ways in which take-up might be increased.
- The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of specific groups of pupils. For example, groups providing nurture for the most vulnerable pupils and challenge for the most able pupils in Year 7 have been timetabled.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well supported by the curriculum. All pupils in key stage 3 follow the global studies course. This subject helps pupils to understand the wider world and their place in it. Pupils across the school also benefit from a well-designed personal, social and health education course. Staff are proactive in their efforts to ensure that pupils receive the most up-to-date guidance on sex and relationships as part of this course.
- Leaders have invested greater resources into work to overcome poor attendance.

The team of staff responsible for tackling absence has increased in size. Staff are receiving training; they are working closely with the education welfare officer and monitoring attendance on a regular basis. Attendance is discussed at every senior leadership and governor meeting, and the needs of individual pupils are better understood. Leaders are now analysing patterns of attendance more effectively than they were. This work is paying off in some respects. For example, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, attendance overall and for different groups is below average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is too high.

- Fixed-term exclusions have risen because of leaders' introduction of the 'disruption-free learning' system. The new system has raised expectations of pupils and led to a 'spike' in exclusions. Leaders acknowledge that exclusions are too high but argue convincingly that they are necessary in the short term to improve behaviour.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils study a language in key stage 4 and steps are taken to improve the achievement of pupils in languages
- efforts continue to improve pupils' attendance
- action is taken to reduce fixed-term exclusions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, inspectors spoke with senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector also spoke to representatives of the governing body and the multi-academy trust.

Inspectors visited lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning and scrutinised the work in pupils' books. They also spoke with groups of pupils.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and governors' minutes. Information relating to

pupils' attendance, exclusion and pupil premium funding was also considered. Additionally, the lead inspector scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children.

Inspectors took account of the 105 responses to the Parent View online survey. In addition, inspectors took account of the 67 responses to the staff survey and the 128 responses to the pupil survey issued during the inspection.