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Mr Richard Millard
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Dear Mr Richard Millard

Short inspection of Mark Rutherford School

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 2016 with Jacqueline Thornalley, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2013

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

- Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2015 you have acted swiftly to make improvements across the school. The monitoring of teaching and the tracking of teaching are now rigorous and have raised the quality of learning in key areas.
- You responded well to a decline in outcomes for some subjects in 2015. The subjects where examination results were not as good as predicted have been targeted for support. The improvements in these subjects are clear and pupils currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve significantly better than last year. You have assured yourself and your senior colleagues of the accuracy of these predictions by having them moderated externally.
- You challenged many of the GCSE results in 2015 and requested a large number of re-marks. This resulted in considerable changes to your overall results, which represents good progress as this year group were below the national average when in Key Stage 2. Progress in mathematics was also good, and pupils achieved broadly average outcomes in this subject.
- Levels of attainment in many subjects are in line with national levels. Science continues to be a strength of the school. Staffing changes and temporary teachers contributed to the decline in outcomes for some subjects in 2015, including modern foreign languages, geography and history. These subjects

are back on track now and predictions for this year are very positive.

- Leaders, including heads of subjects, are involved in monitoring the quality of teaching. This includes formal lesson observations and more informal visits to classrooms. At present, leaders are not making enough use of the evidence contained within pupils' work to evaluate the impact of teaching over time.
- You are working with a restructured senior leadership team. They have a clear understanding of the direction that the school is going and are committed to improvement in all areas. A good example of this is the significant improvement in attendance. In 2015 rates of attendance were well below the national average and some groups, such as girls and disadvantaged pupils were exceptionally low. This has been tackled very effectively and the picture is much more positive: the Educational Welfare Officer has contacted the school to congratulate you on the turnaround, as rates of attendance are now in line with national averages and there is little difference between different groups of pupils.
- The sixth form has improved. Learners here receive good guidance and make well-informed choices about their courses. They receive effective pastoral support and thrive in a very positive learning environment. Learners enter A- and AS-level courses with levels of qualifications that are a little lower than the national average. They consistently make better than average progress and achieve in line with national levels in many courses. Those that take vocational courses do particularly well, leaving the sixth form with very strong qualifications. Current assessment information indicates that this improving trend is set to continue.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. Pupils say that disruption to their learning is rare and if it does occur, teachers deal with it effectively. Pupils' attitudes to their lessons are very positive, and they enjoy positive relationships with teachers. This means that lessons are calm and productive. Pupils work hard.
- The school's resource unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder continues to offer high-quality provision for a small number of pupils, some of whom are in the sixth form. These pupils receive individually tailored programmes of work, some of which lead to formal qualifications and some of which are designed to prepare them for their next steps.
- The curriculum is carefully matched to pupils' needs. This has improved recently. In the past, some pupils opted for GCSE courses that did not suit their aptitudes. This resulted in pupils gaining lower grades than they might have done. Your work to tackle this and provide pupils with more suitable pathways in Key Stage 4 has been effective.
- Pupils enter the school at different stages: around 60 join at Year 7 and many more join them in Year 9. Work to establish and develop transition arrangements has been ongoing. School leaders are aware that more work is needed to promote a smooth transition between primary and secondary schools in response to changes in the national curriculum in both phases.
- Governors provide both support and challenge for school leaders. They have a very clear understanding of their role and are systematic in fulfilling it. Governors are aware of the school's strengths and where it needs to further improve. Governors monitor the school's work well and contribute to its strategic planning.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Systems and procedures to safeguard pupils meet statutory requirements. Previous-employment checks on staff are undertaken carefully and records are well organised.
- Requirements to train staff in child protection are met. Additional training has also taken place to ensure that school policies are clearly understood by teachers and support staff. Pupils who are at risk or are vulnerable are well supported by a pastoral and special needs team that know these pupils well.

Inspection findings

- School leaders have prioritised the right things in the recent past. The impact of their work can be seen in many areas of the curriculum. Rigorous monitoring of attendance, behaviour and progress have had a marked impact on these areas. Pupils and staff are positive about the recent changes and many took the opportunity to talk to inspectors about their experiences.
- The school's examination results in 2015 indicated that standards were in decline. The true picture is much more positive because of the substantial number of re-marked examinations that came back with an improved grade.
- In 2015, Year 11 pupils joined the school at different points and from different schools. Many joined in Year 9 with starting points that were very low when compared to national levels. These pupils made better than average progress during their time in Years 9, 10 and 11 and many left with a good number of qualifications.
- Leaders have dealt effectively with staffing changes in key subjects. New appointments have supported improvements in the English and modern foreign languages departments. In addition, more support has been provided for subject leaders to ensure that current pupils are on track to achieve well. Teachers' assessments and predictions have been carefully moderated to ensure accuracy. This has given leaders confidence in the assessment information that teachers and subject leaders are presenting.
- Current pupils are making good progress across the school. Evidence in pupils' books shows that work is of a good standard across a range of subjects. The great majority of pupils take care with their presentation and their pride in the work is apparent. Assessment systems are changing and subject leaders are monitoring the move from GCSE grades to a numerical 1–9 system in 2017. At present, many teachers are being sensibly cautious with their assessments as they become familiar with the new arrangements. Given this, predictions for both Year 10 and 11 indicate that pupils will continue to make good progress and, in several subjects, achieve standards that are above the national average.
- The sixth form was not a focus of this inspection because its outcomes have improved considerably since the predecessor school was inspected. In 2015, the proportion of learners gaining three A levels at A* to E was in broadly in line with the national level. This represents good progress as these learners entered the sixth form with standards that were below the national average. The proportion of learners gaining the higher grades or A* to B also rose and was 47% in 2015. More learners are now opting for academic courses, but

those who choose vocational routes are also doing very well, with a very large proportion of them achieving the highest grade of distinction plus.

- Sixth formers have a high profile in the school. Many take on mentoring roles and recognise the importance of supporting younger pupils. In addition, sixth formers take on paid roles and help the smooth running of the school. Inspectors spoke with sixth formers in meetings and around the school. They were very positive about the guidance and support that they receive, and about the school on the whole; one described it as being 'like a family – a very happy family'.
- The way that leaders monitor the quality of teaching has become much more systematic in recent months. A very structured approach has been unrolled and all areas of the school's work are checked by leaders at various levels. This information is then processed by the senior leadership team, who use it to modify their plans and their self-evaluation. At present, leaders make formal observations of teachers on two occasions per year. These are usefully used to check that senior leaders' expectations are being met but the opportunity to check the impact of teachers' work over time is not being taken. The routine and regular scrutiny of pupils' work does not feature highly enough on the programme of monitoring at present.
- The school's interventions to support disadvantaged pupils are effective. Gaps between these pupils and others have narrowed and are now lower than is the national picture. Across the school these gaps vary in size: in some year groups they have closed completely, while in others they remain. Leaders are becoming much more strategic about which pupils receive specific support or interventions so that they can match the additional funding to pupils' needs.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is well used and is having a significant impact on achievement. The Raising Achievement Centre benefits from this funding and here pupils are making rapid gains and are developing key skills that will support their learning in the future. Pupils' abilities in reading are also accelerating because of the interventions that are in place. More training for staff would support this aspect of their work so that they could more fully understand the way that pupils are taught to read in primary schools.
- The transition arrangements for the school are complex, as different groups join in Years 7 and 9. Local changes to the way that schools are organised are likely to result in more pupils joining the school in Year 7. It is therefore important that subject leaders work closely with primary school colleagues to ensure that pupils enjoy a smooth transition into the secondary phase, and that their prior learning is taken into account when planning work in Key Stage 3.
- The school curriculum is well supported by extra-curricular activities that are popular with pupils and are well attended. The school promotes British values through its overall ethos and this helps to create a positive and productive atmosphere where pupils can be individuals and are confident that they can seek adult support if necessary.
- The number of parents who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) was 80 by the end of the inspection. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive and 90% would recommend the school to other parents.

- The role of governors is very clear. Effective leadership of governance has established a strategic role that maintains a clear overview of the school's work and its improvement, without becoming involved in the day-to-day operational running of the school. This provides governors with a good opportunity to challenge school leaders and to support them in their work. Governors managed the appointment of the new headteacher and senior leadership team effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders make more use of pupils' work to check on the quality of learning over time
- partnerships between the primary feeder schools are developed further to support transition between Years 6 and 7.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Bedford Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, two governors and pupils to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. The school's self-evaluation documentation was evaluated and discussed. Inspectors visited lessons, observed teaching and looked at pupils' work in several subjects. Some of these visits to lessons were with senior leaders. The school's improvement plans, its safeguarding records, attendance and exclusion data and assessment information were also evaluated by inspectors.