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10 June 2015

Mr David Hutton  
Headteacher  
Northgate High School  
Sidegate Lane West  
Ipswich  
IP4 3DL

Dear Mr Hutton

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Northgate High School**

Following my visit on 9 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students.

This monitoring 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 the achievement of disadvantaged students. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the school.

### **Evidence**

I met with you, your leadership team, members of staff, groups of students, parents, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. We had the opportunity to scrutinise a summary of the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, a review of pupil premium expenditure, governors' minutes, attendance and achievement data, and performance management objectives. I also looked at students' work, and evidence from the local authority's monitoring programme

### **Context**

The school was last inspected in May 2012, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good. It is much larger than the average secondary school. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average.

## **The impact of leadership and management in raising achievement of disadvantaged students**

Published results indicate that in 2013 the proportions of disadvantaged students making expected and beyond expected progress were approaching those of other students in the school. However, in 2014 the progress and attainment of these students was lower than that of other students in the school and nationally.

Progress is now accelerating as a result of a concerted approach across the school to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. In Year 11, gaps in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and their peers remain but are narrower than for the last Year 11. In Year 10, assessment information indicates that the gap is much narrower. There is no gap in attainment in Years 7 and 8, where disadvantaged students make even more rapid progress than their peers. School leaders have devised plans to ensure that this remains the case as students move through years 9 to 11. Teachers within the school check each other's assessments to ensure that this progress is accurately tracked, but governors and school leaders would benefit from a wider external perspective on the standards being achieved.

Leaders at all levels, including governors, are knowledgeable about the school's academic performance, and their self-evaluation of the school's work is accurate. They responded promptly when the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and their peers widened in 2014, after a period of improvement. They have made the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged students a priority within the school improvement plan. A separate plan and review of pupil premium funding gives detailed information on proposed and recent expenditure, and an evaluation of the impact on disadvantaged students' attendance and progress.

School leaders followed the recommendations made at the previous inspection. They now use data effectively across the school to identify where progress has slowed and intervention is required. The leaders of English, mathematics and science are now part of the school's senior leadership team. This change underpins detailed analysis of the progress being made in these subjects by disadvantaged students, and has led to additional resources being deployed to accelerate their progress. The same tracking information is used to hold leaders and teachers to account for the achievement of disadvantaged students, through appropriate objectives that are set for staff across the school.

Work seen in students' books and folders across all three key stages demonstrates strong progress for disadvantaged students. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that students take great pride in their work; teachers assess work constructively, and this detailed assessment is then acted upon by students, who make faster progress as a result. Sixth form folders are well organised, and staff monitor their quality on a regular basis. The folders are then valuable resources for revision when students are preparing for examinations.

The attendance of disadvantaged students is lower than their peers and lower than other students nationally. The gap in attendance between disadvantaged students and their peers has widened, as the attendance of disadvantaged students has fallen while that of their peers has improved. School leaders have responded by appointing extra staff to increase the capacity of the school to support and challenge poor attendance, and through a programme which involves daily contact between the school and parents of pupils in the targeted group. Parents value this contact; school staff respond quickly to their queries, and are swift to alert them to any difficulties faced by their children during the school day. As a result, the proportion of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 3 who are persistent absentees is falling and is now closer to the national average.

School leaders have devised effective systems to aid the transition of disadvantaged students from primary to secondary school. Close liaison with teachers of Year 6 pupils in feeder primary schools ensures that staff in this school have detailed information on the strengths and needs of disadvantaged students who join the school in the September of Year 7. The summer school for these students is growing in popularity, and events such as information evenings aimed specifically at the parents of disadvantaged students ensure increasing contact between the school and the families of these students. The result has been an improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged students in Key Stage 3 and a decline in the number of fixed term exclusions.

Staff are proactive and creative in their work to ensure that disadvantaged students have appropriate routes into further education, training or employment. The transition to higher education is also well managed. Sixth form students have a high regard for the guidance they receive, and the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are applying for university places, including Oxford and Cambridge, is increasing over time.

### **External support**

The local authority provides effective support and monitoring of the school's work to address the underachievement of disadvantaged students. It has confidence in the capacity of school leaders and the strategies that have been put into place, and monitors progress on a termly basis.

### **The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- Persistent absence of disadvantaged students is falling in Key Stage 3, and the overall attendance of these students is improving.
- There is no gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their peers in years 7 and 8 compared to KS2 starting points. The achievement of disadvantaged students in these year groups is higher than their peers.

- School staff support the parents of disadvantaged students well. The frequent and high quality communication between home and school is having a beneficial impact on behaviour, attendance and achievement.
- School leaders have successfully raised the aspirations of sixth form students with regard to applications for higher education. Students are given effective guidance and the number of applications to universities is rising over time.

**The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:**

- Current strategies and the additional capacity to reduce persistent absence and to improve the attendance of disadvantaged students have been implemented too recently to show an impact at Key Stage 4.
- The more rigorous focus on the achievement of disadvantaged students has not yet proved to be sufficient to fully close the wide gap between disadvantaged students and their peers in Key Stage 4.
- The information held by the school on the current achievement of disadvantaged students is not subject to sufficient external scrutiny. This limits school leaders' knowledge of what disadvantaged students can achieve, and their ability to benefit from best practice elsewhere.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Sustain the current focus of senior and middle leaders on the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of disadvantaged students' achievement, in order to accelerate the progress of this group of students.
- Improve the attendance of disadvantaged students, by making effective use of the extra staff that the school has appointed for this purpose.
- Utilise external expertise to confirm the accuracy of school data on the current achievement of disadvantaged students.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk, to the Secretary of State for Education, and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Sharpe  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

- Secretary of State for Education
- Chair of the Governing Body
- Director of Children's Services for Suffolk