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Mr David Hutton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hutton

Short inspection of Northgate High School

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2015 with David Davies HMI, 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

- You are setting a clear direction for a capable team of senior leaders. Teachers are positive about their work and understand your vision for the school's further improvement.
- The school has improved in key areas. Pupils are making strong progress across the school as a result of effective teaching.
- Pupils achieved very well in Year 11 in 2015. The proportion that gained 5 A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was well above the national level.
- Learners gain good qualifications in the sixth form. It has established a good reputation and attracts many learners from other schools.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Their attitudes to learning are good; disruption to learning is uncommon and when it does occur it is dealt with effectively.
- You have prioritised the right things since the last inspection. Senior leaders and class teachers now make good use of assessment information to promote learning. Teachers know which pupils are doing well and which ones need additional help.
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. They are generating an enthusiasm for finding out

what really works in classrooms and are keen to share the good practice that they find. This means that teachers and subject leaders are learning from one another and many are enjoying the challenge and reward that this brings.

- Pupils who are at risk of underachieving receive good support through interventions that are often targeted directly at individual needs. This is well developed in Key Stage 4, where pupils receive especially effective support in the run-up to their examinations. Systems are less well developed in Years 7 and 8. Intervention in these year groups is focused on supporting the less-able pupils and those with special educational needs. This support is of a good quality. However, pupils who may be underachieving or coasting in these year groups, and especially those who are disadvantaged, are not identified for support as quickly as those in Key Stage 4.
- A monitoring inspection of the school's provision for disadvantaged pupils in the summer term of 2015 identified areas where things could be improved, alongside things that were working well. You have taken the recommendations on board and your work to support disadvantaged pupils has improved. Attainment gaps between these and other pupils are narrowing.
- Many pupils take pride in their work, and their exercise books are tidy and well presented. There are, in contrast, some examples in most classes where presentation is not good enough. In many cases these are boys' books. More work needs to be done to ensure that all pupils take care and pride in the way in which they present their work.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.
- Teaching, support staff and governors have undertaken safeguarding training. A governor oversees safeguarding and checks to see that procedures are in place.

Inspection findings

- Pupils achieved well in the most recent examinations. In many subjects, including mathematics, English, geography and history, more pupils gained a grade C or better than the national level. In some subjects, such as drama, resistant materials and art and design, the proportion gaining a good GCSE was exceptionally high.
- Senior leaders have a very clear plan for the further improvement of the school. A significant restructuring of the pastoral leadership is underway. Currently, there are year leaders who have a mainly pastoral role. This is being replaced by a system in which all year group leaders are fully focused

on learning and progress, and are supported by other leaders whose focus is on the pastoral work of the school. A deputy headteacher is set to line manage these leaders.

- Pupils, parents and staff who responded to the inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive.
- Of the 82 pupils who responded, 74 were clear that they enjoy school. In most lessons pupils feel challenged and well supported by teachers and support staff. They feel safe in school and are confident that if they have a problem, a member of staff is on hand to help them or provide guidance.
- The number of parents who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) was 261 by the end of the inspection. Of these, 94% would recommend the school to another parent. Several parents wrote comments to accompany their views. All but one of these were very positive. A common theme of the comments is how parents value the support that their children receive. Many are also very pleased with the progress that their children make at the school. One commented, 'I cannot praise this school highly enough, not just for its positive ethos but also for the enthusiasm and caring attitudes of all the members of staff I have met.'
- A significant proportion of staff (98 in total) also completed their questionnaire. Virtually all of the respondents support the school's leadership, feel trusted and are proud to be a member of staff. They highlight the collaborative culture that has been developed which, according to one teacher, 'encourages risk taking and professional development'.
- Pupils' attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is now in line with the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been too low for some time. Although it is not yet in line with that of other pupils, it is much improved. The school appointed an Engagement and Safeguarding Officer in February 2015 with a specific remit to tackle this issue. This has been a successful strategy as it has increased the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others who do not attend often enough.
- A similar picture existed in the school's exclusion data: while the overall proportion of pupils excluded was in line with the national levels, too many of these pupils were disadvantaged. The levels of exclusion had dropped significantly in the last year, and disadvantaged pupils are no longer over-represented amongst these pupils. A revised behaviour code, in place for this academic year, has improved things and pupils now more fully understand the possible consequences of not following the simple set of school rules.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to their education are often seen in the pride that many take to ensure that their work is well presented. In all of the classes visited by inspectors, there were examples of pupils' work which showed real pride and care. These pupils spoke of the importance of keeping books well organised. One pupil, for example, made very good use of different

coloured pens to make her work very clear. This was, as she said, 'to make it easier for me to revise'. This commitment and pride is, however, not universal. In the same classes there were pupils whose work was quite the opposite; untidy and careless, with a low standard of handwriting. The majority of these pupils were boys. For some, the answer at least partially lies in the way that they sit as they write. Some were slouching, others using the same hand to hold their book and write at the same time while the other hand propped up their head. These habits make neat handwriting very difficult.

- The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is very effective. Pupils are identified for support before they start the school in Year 7 and their progress is closely monitored. The interventions that support their learning are altered to match pupils' needs. Pupils with significant need are supported through a scheme called the 'Foundation Learning Programme', which takes them out of mainstream classes for a period of time to prepare them to be able to learn more effectively. This has been successful in supporting these pupils to remain in school and adopt positive attitudes to their education.
- Strategies to support disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 4 have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Senior and subject leaders have sought out the best ways to narrow the attainment gaps between this group of pupils and others. In 2015, it narrowed in English more than it did in mathematics – where there is still two thirds of a GCSE difference. The school's assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils in the current Years 10 and 11 are on track to make good progress and narrow the gaps further. The picture is more complex in years 7, 8 and 9 as the school's historical data show a trend of gaps being slender in Years 7 and 8 and then growing considerably in Year 9. School leaders are confident that this is an issue associated with more precise assessment in Year 9 and are introducing a common assessment format that will treat all pupils equally from Year 7 to Year 11. The message beneath the data is clear: disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 3 need more support to ensure that the gaps start to close from the start of Year 7. At present, this has started to happen but is at an early stage and is largely untested. Strategies in Key Stage 4, including homework clubs, booster classes and the provision of revision materials, have been welcomed by pupils. The mathematics department has also produced a series of screencasts in which teachers guide pupils through examination questions. Pupils watch these on a computer or tablet and stop/start the video as required. Pupils who lack confidence with certain aspects of the subject will view the solution and then work through it themselves. Others will try to answer the question independently and then view the 'model' answer. A huge amount of time and effort has been invested to produce this resource, which has been very well received by pupils. Other departments, including science and English, are now producing similar resources.

- The sixth form is well led. A senior leader oversees four assistant heads of sixth form, who each have responsibility for around 150 learners. In many subjects, including biology, fine art, history, economics and English literature, learners make better than average progress and gain good grades in their examinations at AS and A2 level.
- The sixth form also offers a range of vocational courses. Several of these courses are offered to very small classes and the outcomes are consistently good.
- The school employs study support staff in the sixth form to ensure that sixth formers are helped to learn and thrive in the same way as younger pupils. In addition, a higher-level teaching assistant is based in the sixth form to support learning. The guidance that learners receive about their next steps in education, training or employment is well structured.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that the support and interventions that are in place for disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 4 also benefit pupils in Key Stage 3
- improve standards of pupils' handwriting and presentation so that these are consistently good throughout the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk County 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, 11 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 data and assessment information were also evaluated by inspectors. In addition, a coffee lunch in a local church, attended by many pupils and sixth formers, was visited.