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22 January 2016

David Allsop
The Queen Elizabeth's High School, Gainsborough
Morton Terrace
Gainsborough
Lincolnshire
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Dear Mr Allsop

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Queen Elizabeth's High School, Gainsborough

Following my visit with Deirdre Duignan, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

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 outcomes for pupils at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to pupil outcomes at Key Stages 4 and 5 for the last academic year and for current pupils across all years. Inspectors also considered documents relating to the quality of teaching, safeguarding, attendance and governance. Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders with responsibility for achievement, safeguarding, the sixth form and pupil premium. Pupil premium is additional government funding provided for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority. Inspectors met with subject leaders, heads of house, the librarian, members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of an educational consultancy providing support services for the local authority. Inspectors met formally with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most-able pupils. Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally during breaktime when they also observed pupils' behaviour. Inspectors observed seven lessons, three of which were joint lesson observations involving the lead inspector

and the headteacher. An inspector observed a sixth form assembly and considered displays around the school site.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Pupils' achievement and all aspects of their personal development continue to be strong throughout the school.

Context

The Queen Elizabeth's High School is a selective community school. The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a large sixth form. A very small minority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and a similar proportion speak English as an additional language. There are very few disabled pupils or pupils with special educational needs. A very small minority of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. Very few pupils arrive at or leave the school part-way through the academic year. Staffing at the school is stable.

Main findings

Senior leaders, led strongly by the headteacher, have created a culture of high expectations for all pupils within a supportive environment. Staff listen to pupils, cater for their individual needs and support them in their well-being. The headteacher's vision, that the school should serve the needs of the local community, ensures that pupils are encouraged to achieve high grades, while also developing their appreciation of their school and the local community. There is a strong focus on celebrating the history and culture of the school and developing a keen understanding of the social, emotional and moral attributes of good citizenship. As a consequence, pupils achieve highly in their subjects at the same time as developing a deep understanding of the society in which they live.

Senior leaders and governors have equally high expectations of staff. The headteacher and governors have appointed subject leaders who understand the importance of securing effective teaching to ensure pupils make the progress they should. Where there is evidence of underperformance of any kind, senior leaders challenge subject leaders and expect swift improvements. Teachers who perform below the level expected of them receive appropriate support and, as a result, rapid improvements are seen. These high expectations of staff ensure that all are aware of their responsibilities relating to pupils' progress and welfare.

Pupils attain highly at The Queen Elizabeth's High School. Nearly all pupils achieve 5A* to C with English and mathematics at GCSE, while the proportions of pupils achieving more than the progress expected of them in GCSE English and mathematics are above national levels. Pupils perform particularly well in

mathematics, where the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grade has been significantly above national levels for several consecutive years. Pupils sit external examinations in mathematics, reading and science at the end of Year 9. Results from these examinations in the past two years indicate that pupils make more progress in these subjects across Key Stage 3 than their peers nationally. This high achievement is a consequence of the good teaching pupils receive and the close support they can access in cases where they are not on track to making the progress they should.

Although pupils achieve highly, senior leaders are not complacent, but regularly review the school's provision to ensure that standards remain high. Senior leaders conduct a comprehensive review of the performance of past pupils to identify any areas where pupils did not make as much progress as they should have. For example, senior leaders have rightly identified that in 2015 the most-able pupils did not make the progress they should. They have ensured that subject leaders have taken prompt action to raise the achievement of these pupils. For example, the subject leader in English now closely tracks the achievement of the most-able pupils and ensures they receive appropriate support as required. Consequently, the school's own performance information indicates that the proportion of most-able pupils predicted to achieve more than the progress expected of them in English is above national levels.

Senior leaders regularly review pupil progress across all subjects in all years to identify which pupils are falling behind. Working closely with subject leaders, they are able to ensure that pupils receive timely support to enable them to catch up. The school offers a wide range of support, including assertive mentoring, subject tuition and pupil-led mentoring. Subject leaders regularly monitor the impact of this mentoring to ensure it is effective. Pupils who met with the inspectors spoke highly of the support that they receive and recognised the value of the mentoring that the school offers them. Older pupils who are involved in mentoring appreciate these opportunities to develop their own leadership skills, 'give back' to their school community and develop effective relationships with pupils from other years.

Senior leaders regularly review the school's curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of the pupils and secures high achievement. They are mindful of the skills and knowledge that pupils will require to make the next steps in their education and to be effective global citizens. For example, in modern foreign languages, leaders have undertaken research to establish which languages are the most frequently spoken globally, to ensure pupils learn those that are the most relevant. They have reduced the number of languages pupils study in Key Stage 3 to enable pupils to develop their language skills fully and achieve high levels of understanding. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils who are achieving higher levels of understanding by the end of Year 9 has increased. In science, in Key Stage 4, the grouping of pupils has been revised to enable teachers to move pupils between different qualifications according to the needs of the pupil more effectively. This change has resulted in an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving higher

grades in the science subjects. The school's own performance information indicates that current Year 11 pupils will achieve significantly above national levels in science in 2016.

Senior leaders work closely with subject leaders to monitor the quality of teaching and the impact this has on pupils' outcomes. Leaders have good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching through a series of short visits to a number of classes, formal lesson observations, looking at pupils' books and taking into account the progress pupils are making. They use this information to develop a programme of training that is most appropriate to teachers' needs. This has resulted in, for example, a whole-school focus on ensuring that the most-able pupils achieve the highest grades. The development of teacher and learning communities has provided further opportunities for teachers to share ideas and identify best practice from their own school. Consequently, teachers are able to sharpen their practice and secure more rapid progress for their pupils.

Teachers use assessment information to ensure that they plan lessons that meet the needs of their pupils and develop their understanding, knowledge and skills fully. Pupils who met with inspectors reported that they had effective relationships with their teachers, that behaviour in lessons was good, and that they were able to learn well. In the lessons that inspectors observed, teachers had good subject knowledge. They questioned pupils to gauge their learning, clarify misconceptions and challenge the most able. They also encouraged pupils to debate their ideas in order to deepen their understanding, particularly of challenging topics. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, pupils considered how the connotations of a poem might change depending upon the nature of the person the poem was about. The teacher asked pupils to consider different people as the subject of the poem, including a terrorist, a freedom fighter and a child. Pupils handled this controversial subject matter sensitively and discussed the implications with each other and with their teacher in great depth.

The school closely monitors the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders have carefully reviewed the support that disadvantaged pupils receive through the pupil premium to ensure that it meets these pupils' needs most effectively. Heads of house, for example, closely monitor disadvantaged pupils' attendance and provide support where it is required. Consequently, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve while the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school is reducing. Targeted mentoring and subject tutoring have led to an increase in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The school's own performance information indicates that the achievement of current disadvantaged pupils is either equal to or moving closer to that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally across most subjects at Key Stage 4.

A key strength of the school is the focus on pupils' well-being. School leaders and governors recognise the pressures which pupils can find themselves under when meeting the high expectations placed upon them. The school has therefore provided

different ways in which pupils can share any problems they may be experiencing. These include 'peer listeners' (Year 11, 12 and 13 pupils and learners who act as counsellors) and the school counsellor. Pupils who met with the inspectors said that they felt the school encouraged them to raise any concerns they may have. They were aware of who they could go to if they were experiencing difficulties, often naming several members of staff. Pupils were confident that those staff they spoke to would take their concerns seriously and offer appropriate support. The open dialogue between pupils and their peers and between pupils and their teachers is indicative of the inclusive culture of the school.

Pupils are able to enhance their personal development further through the wider curriculum. This includes school trips, which allow pupils to broaden their understanding of the world around them, and the many extra-curricular activities that enable pupils to develop their talents. The house system provides pupils with opportunities to raise money for charity and to be involved in inter-house activities that encourage a healthy level of competition. Thought-provoking and moving displays around the school encourage pupils to stop and reflect on other pupils' work as well as important historical events. For example, one display, created by a pupil, provides information about soldiers in the First World War who lived in the local area, some of whom were past pupils of the school. The display shows where the soldiers lived, their family connections and how they died. A mural, painted by a pupil, shows vividly what life was like in the trenches. Such displays, coupled with the wealth of extra-curricular opportunities, are fundamental to the school's success in developing pupils who are effective citizens.

Outcomes in the sixth form continue to be strong, with progress at both A level and AS level consistently above the national average. The head of sixth form has taken appropriate steps to ensure that learners are prepared for their A-level studies so they can achieve highly. A review of the processes by which pupils move into the sixth form has resulted in the 'Bridging the Gap' programme, by which learners develop their study skills in preparation for the demands of A-level studies. Learners identified as falling behind receive appropriate support to enable them to catch up. These strategies include using Year 13 learners as mentors to Year 12. Learners receive comprehensive support in making their choices about their next steps after sixth form. The school organises talks from universities, local businesses and other local organisations to ensure learners have a comprehensive insight into their options at the end of their sixth form studies. All learners progress on to some form of education, employment, training or apprenticeship, with the head of sixth form continuing to support learners when they have left the school.

There is open communication between senior leaders and governors. Governors receive regular, detailed information about the school's performance. This includes updates on pupils' outcomes, reviews of subjects' performance and analysis of the impact of the pupil premium on the performance of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, governors have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Where there is underperformance of any kind, governors

are insistent that senior leaders must take swift action in order to ensure that current pupils are able to make the progress that they should and attain highly. Governors regularly challenge senior leaders, asking insightful questions of the information they receive.

External support

The school receives support from an education adviser contracted by the local authority. This adviser has supported the school by reviewing the school's self-evaluation and confirming the school's strategies in supporting the progress of different groups of pupils. The adviser has worked with the school in conducting his own review of the school's provision and safeguarding procedures. The school has been able to act upon the recommendations he has made to ensure that provision and procedures are robust, particularly regarding the explicit promotion of fundamental British values. The local authority also provided the school with an opportunity to review its provision for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, the school has refined the support that these pupils receive.

The school is part of the Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance, while the headteacher leads a cluster of schools within the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership and is chair of the Lincolnshire Consortium of Grammar Schools. Membership of each of these external educational organisations provides the school with valuable opportunities to share best practice, review the school's provision, receive support where appropriate, and support other schools.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for teachers to share best practice to ensure that all teaching is as effective as the best.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth

Her Majesty's Inspector