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Mr Philip Stack
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Dear Mr Stack

Short inspection of Oriel High School

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 2016 with Ann McCarthy 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is improving because of the very good leadership that you and your senior leadership team provide. You, together with governors and the senior leadership team, have a very accurate understanding of the school and use this to identify strengths and priorities. You usefully obtain external validation of the quality of your work from the local authority and through working with other local schools.

Since the last inspection, the school has continued to focus on the areas identified for improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching and the proportion of pupils achieving five higher-grade GCSEs including English and mathematics have significantly improved over the past two years. Although progress has been made, leaders and governors openly reflect that more needs to be done to improve achievement in the sixth form.

Pupils are rightly proud of their school and their behaviour remains very good. There is a strong community spirit and the school is a warm and welcoming place to be. The schools' organisation into learning communities, with mixed-age mentoring groups, is particularly valued by staff and pupils. This nurtures good working relationships between staff and pupils and ensures that all pupils' pastoral and welfare needs are given careful support, alongside their academic requirements. As a consequence, pupils feel that staff care for them and understand their needs.

The quality of teaching and assessment is well led and managed. Most teachers plan interesting lessons and use effective questioning to promote deeper thinking and reflection and ensure a swift pace of learning. Leaders are aware that in a small minority of lessons, teachers offer less challenge and the pace is slower and systems are in place to support these teachers. Pupils know their targets and their high-quality work in their books demonstrates that they make good progress. As a result, pupils do as well as, or better than, other pupils nationally in their GCSE examinations in nearly all subject areas. Learners in the sixth form feel well supported by their teachers and those currently in the school are making better progress in their A-level subjects than has been the case in the past.

Staff morale is very high and there is a sense of pride in the quality of learning in the school from them and from pupils. Pupils confidently welcome visitors, are proud to share their work and enjoy working with their teachers. Displays of very high-quality artwork and classwork in corridors and classrooms celebrate the high standards that pupils are achieving.

Pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils) have not achieved as well as their peers in the past. You and governors rightly see this as an urgent priority and there remains more to be done to close these gaps. The steps leaders are currently taking to improve the progress for this group are being successful.

Attendance remains above the national average. However, you are aware that the attendance of some groups, including those eligible for the pupil premium and some pupils with special educational needs or disability, needs to be better. You have successfully introduced a range of initiatives which are beginning to reduce these gaps in attendance for these groups.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors appropriately place a very high emphasis on pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders have ensured that policies and guidelines on all relevant aspects of safeguarding are in place and clearly steer the good practice in the school. Records are detailed and of a high quality. All adults who work with the pupils are checked appropriately and staff have received relevant and regular training on safeguarding. Regular communication between key staff and other agencies ensures timely and effective support for pupils of concern and reviews the impact of actions already taken.

Through the planned curriculum, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Pupils and sixth formers confirm that they feel safe and know that members of staff are always available for them to share any concerns.

Inspection findings

- The school's effectiveness remains securely good. You give the school strong, purposeful and strategic leadership. Your vision to restructure at middle and senior leadership level has ensured clearer lines of responsibility for academic and pastoral leadership. This has led to significantly improved standards of achievement and welfare. In addition, the recent restructuring of the governing body has enabled the recruitment of new governors with a range of skills and professional expertise to support the school. You are now very ably supported by your senior team and governing body to bring about further improvements.
- Governors are well informed about the work of the school. They offer expert and insightful challenge to you and your senior team. The Chair of the Governing Body is rightly very proud of the school and he ensures that the governing body now offers very good strategic support for its development.
- Leaders are accurate in their evaluation of the school's performance and improvement planning is detailed and clearly identifies priorities, actions, timescales and expected outcomes. As a result, leaders have responded well to the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. Governors and leaders are aware that the plans for the sixth form are less detailed and that the pace of improvement of the sixth form has not been as rapid as it has been in the rest of the school. Senior leaders agree that they need to sharpen these plans so that they can be used by governors to hold leaders to account for continued improvement in the achievement of learners during the 16–19 study pathways.
- Outcomes at Key Stage 4 have improved over the past two years and the school's own assessment information shows that, overall, this improvement is continuing and most pupils are making good progress. Leaders have invested in extra staffing and resources in English, which has led to pupils making significantly better progress at GCSE.
- In previous years the progress made by learners following A-level courses was below national averages. However, current sixth formers are making better progress than in the past and accurate tracking systems, based on regular assessments, identify that learners are now making progress in line with national averages. Leaders have accurate tracking systems in place and have used them to ensure that the rates of progress in different A-level subjects are now much more consistent.
- The school makes good use of additional funding to invest in extra lessons and a range of resources to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs. As a result, the gaps between the progress made by these groups and their peers are closing in nearly all year groups. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to close the gaps in Year 9 between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in mathematics and the gaps that exist in Year 11 between the progress of pupils with special educational needs or disability and their peers.

- The Special Support Centre (a resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs) is very well led and a strength of the school. Leaders are passionate about wanting the best for every pupil and relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong. Teachers and teaching assistants know how to work well together to inspire and challenge the pupils and communicate well with parents. As a result, pupils with special educational needs supported in the Special Support Centre make good progress.
- Most teachers have high expectations and use their good subject knowledge to design stimulating lessons. They focus clearly on pupils' intended learning. Teachers give helpful feedback and clear guidance to pupils and they use this to improve their work. Inspectors witnessed how many teachers use questioning and discussion very effectively to probe and develop pupils' understanding. Where this happens, pupils' books evidence how they make good progress in lessons and over time. In a small minority of lessons seen, the teacher's expectations were not as high and the pace of learning was slower.
- Senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in lessons accurately and identify strengths and priorities swiftly. For example, senior leaders have rightly prioritised ensuring that all teachers concentrate upon literacy and the use of subject-specific vocabulary to support more pupils to make higher levels of progress. Inspectors witnessed teachers promoting literacy and challenging pupils to produce detailed explanations in English, mathematics and history lessons. As a result, pupils were confidently discussing and analysing difficult concepts in depth.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and continue to behave very well in lessons and around the school site. They value their learning and play a full part in lessons. The pupils and sixth formers spoken to during the visit were keen to share how much they appreciate the support and help that their teachers give them. Although this is a large school, it does not feel like one. The organisation of the school into learning communities clearly fosters good, close working relationships between staff and pupils and pupils of different ages. Older pupils and sixth formers speak with pride about how they are able to support younger pupils.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and happy at the school and parents confirmed this view. Bullying was thought to be rare and pupils are confident that any issues that arise are swiftly resolved by staff when they do occur.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- gaps in the achievement of pupils eligible for the pupil premium and others in school continue to close rapidly and securely
- consistently high expectations, pace and challenge are maintained throughout the school in all lessons
- more robust self-evaluation and improvement planning for the sixth form enables it to improve at the same rate as other areas of 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 West Sussex County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 15 lessons in the school, and looked at learning jointly with the headteacher. We spoke with pupils in lessons and looked at some of their work as well as meeting with pupils and sixth formers both formally and informally. Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders and a representative of the local authority. I held a telephone conversation with the Chair of Governors. Documentary evidence, including policies, strategic planning documents and analyses of pupils' achievements were evaluated. We also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and records of governing body meetings. I also evaluated the responses of 149 parents to the online Parent View survey as well as responses to staff and pupil questionnaires.