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Ms Carol Dallas
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Dear Ms Dallas

Short inspection of Taverham High School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2016 with David Hutton, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Your leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. They have led improvements and managed effectively a period of significant change, including your recent arrival as headteacher. They have done this well, by providing stability for the school and building on the many strengths identified in the last inspection. Your appointment has added further impetus to the drive to improve the school further. Staff, pupils and parents speak favourably about the immediate impact you have made in forging relations, tightening up procedures and providing a clear, strategic direction for the school's future development.

Overall standards achieved by pupils remain above average. Achievement is exceptionally high in mathematics, English literature and some sciences. Pupils excel in music, French and business studies. Excellent improvement in GCSE results in recent years has been acknowledged this year in a letter from the Government's Minister of State for Schools, praising the school for being in the top 100 non-selective state-funded schools in England.

We found that the school's caring, nurturing ethos and culture of high achievement is based firmly on the excellent relations promoted between pupils and staff. Pupils told us that teachers are approachable, know them well and are always there to offer help and support. They value this highly; praising the sense of community it

creates and enabling them to feel totally safe, secure and generally free from bullying in the school. They also said that teachers go out of their way to protect them, and provide them with a wide range of after-school clubs, revision sessions and off-site visits that stimulates their wider engagement, makes learning enjoyable and enriches their lives.

The school buildings provide a rich, stimulating environment in which to learn. The library is a haven for pupils who are keen to read, broaden their learning and complete personal study. Classrooms, corridors and social areas are calm, orderly and enhanced with vibrant displays of pupils' work and their achievements. Notice boards show that your staff are adept at motivating pupils and giving them the self-confidence to lead, volunteer and help others. The work of your 'ELFs' in providing friendship and a listening ear for those feeling vulnerable or concerned is most impressive, as is your recent 'Ragfest' organised by sixth-form learners that raised an astonishing amount of money for charity.

Good behaviour in and outside of lessons reflects the high expectations you and your staff have of pupils. We found them to be polite, well-mannered and respectful. They engaged in informal conversation with us, held doors open and allowed us to look at their work. In lessons, most pupils are attentive, cooperative and readily engage in learning. At breaks and lunchtimes, they conduct themselves sensibly and calmly, adding to the harmonious atmosphere in and around the buildings. Pupils and parents told us that behaviour is not always managed as effectively by a small proportion of temporary staff you employ. You acknowledge that more needs to be done to gain greater consistency, and plans are in place to improve this.

Changes in staffing and some teacher absence have weakened teaching in some subjects but leaders have ensured that overall it remains good. The school has some exceptional teachers, each with their own inimitable style and approach. This is particularly notable in mathematics, where pupils make remarkable progress, so much so that gaps in the attainment and progress between a small minority of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school have closed. Further work is needed to achieve this in English. New appointments have strengthened the quality of English teaching. They bring with them detailed subject knowledge and a great understanding and enthusiasm for literature.

Achievement has been raised since the last inspection, but the work of senior leaders to increase significantly the progress made by pupils in English and for those who have special educational needs has had less of an impact. To tackle this, you have shared your vision for improving teaching and learning with staff and have made your expectations of them quite clear. A recent staff review and tighter procedures to manage their performance have clarified their roles and responsibilities in securing further improvement. New assessment procedures are in place to routinely monitor and record the progress pupils make in all subjects. Staff have welcomed your clear leadership and determination to improve teaching and learning further.

Most learners in the sixth form join from Year 11 because they like the small-sized

teaching groups, already know their teachers and feel that staff do their utmost to meet their academic and personal needs. You feel that learners are capable of achieving more and have taken immediate steps to help them do this by relocating their study base to a central part of the building and by sharpening leaders' monitoring of their progress and welfare.

Prior to this inspection, no parents or carers had shared their views of the school using Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This is unusual for a large school that sits in the heart of its local, rural community. Your recent appointment provides an ideal opportunity to engage with them more often, and to harness their full support to help you and your staff make the school outstanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Entry onto the school site is fully secure. Areas to socialise and play are routinely supervised by staff during breaks and lunchtimes. Your policy and procedures to keep pupils safe are robust. The single central record is fully maintained and meets all requirements. Child protection procedures including the recruitment of new staff are firmly established; up-to-date training, including training relating to the 'Prevent' duty, led by senior leaders, ensures that all staff know what to do if they have concerns. Partnerships with local support services and the police are in place to enable your staff to provide pupils at the most risk from harm with the care and protection they need.

Inspection findings

- You and your senior leaders know the school's strengths, weaknesses and the actions needed to improve them. You have wasted no time in finding out what is done well and not so well, and are using your previous experience of headship, and the fresh ideas you bring with you, to inform plans for further improvement. Your deputy, who took responsibility for the school last year as acting headteacher, provides you with good support as you settle into your role. Governors show a partial awareness of what is needed to improve, but require further guidance from you to clarify their roles and responsibilities.
- Overall rates of progress have improved significantly over the past three years, and pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 has risen year on year since the last inspection. Based on their average starting points when they join in Year 7, this represents good progress. Higher than average proportions of pupils achieve A* to C grades in English, mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, information technology, French, music and business studies.
- Results show that not enough is done by leaders, at all levels, to ensure that most-able pupils make accelerated progress and go on to achieve A* and A grades. These pupils are provided with a wide range of activities and events to enrich and promote their learning, but you and your senior leaders acknowledge that teachers have to raise their expectations of what these pupils are capable of achieving, and provide them with sufficiently challenging work in lessons that stretches them fully.

- The exceptional progress pupils make in mathematics is securely based on stable, well-established teaching and effective leadership and management of the subject. Staff show a detailed understanding of GCSE syllabus and examination requirements. They apply their own methods to provide pupils with a thorough grounding in mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding, and routinely check their learning and progress at regular intervals to ensure that they are making sufficient progress.
- Sustained improvements made in mathematics are not matched in English. Changes in staffing, some low expectations and a lack of thorough monitoring of different groups of pupils have restricted the progress they make, especially disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' books show that in some lessons, expectations of them and the work they produce are not high enough. Not all marking enables pupils to correct basic errors in their spelling and grammar. Your leaders are taking a range of actions to rectify this, including holding staff more accountable for pupils' achievement, and increasing the monitoring of their absence so that disadvantaged pupils attend as regularly as others. The good practice evident in teaching, leading and managing mathematics has not been shared fully with staff in the English department.
- Observations of lessons carried out with you and your senior leaders confirmed your own views that over time, the quality of teaching is mostly good, and at times outstanding. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge; they know their pupils well and usually set high expectations of them. Good relations and a range of different resources enable pupils to learn at a fast rate. Teachers take time to check that they secure a good understanding before moving on to the next stage.
- Not all teachers ask questions that challenge pupils' thinking, or let them share and discuss their views before responding. When this happens some pupils sit back and let others who are keen to answer do the work. Teachers are given 'pupil profiles' of those pupils with special educational needs, but these documents do not contain enough detail to help staff to plan suitable learning tasks for them.
- Your improved monitoring of the progress, attendance and welfare of disadvantaged pupils is enabling them to make better progress this year, across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Simple strategies, such as teachers knowing who these pupils are in their lessons and keeping a sharper eye on their progress, are working. Governors feel they monitor effectively how additional government funding to raise the achievement of these pupils is used, but until recently this has had little impact.
- Your curriculum enables pupils to pursue their interests in a broad range of GCSE and A-level courses. This is complemented by a wide range of sports and arts enrichment and opportunities to gain sports leader and the Duke of Edinburgh awards. Pupils show some understanding of fundamental British values gained from regular personal, social, health and economic education lessons, but older pupils told us that they would like more of this and also further information about managing their personal finances to prepare them for adult life.
- Attendance is above average because it is routinely checked by pastoral

- staff. Their improved monitoring and effective action to tackle absence is encouraging pupils who are often absent to attend more regularly. Notable success has been achieved in attracting higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs or disability back into the school. This is having a direct impact on improving their attitudes towards learning and their overall progress.
- The work of your staff in the ACE centre, who provide high-quality care and support for the school's most vulnerable pupils, was praised highly by pupils during their discussions with us, and by their parents who responded by free text during the inspection. They commented that without this personalised support and care, some pupils dealing with anxiety and other issues affecting their health would not have been able to continue their studies. Similarly, high-quality care and nurturing in the 'Kave' enables younger pupils to boost their confidence and, through one-to-one support, gain the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to help them catch up and engage fully in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.
 - In the sixth form, the large majority of learners in Year 12 continue their A-level studies into Year 13 and go on to achieve what is expected of them. Approximately half of these learners go on to university. You feel that expectations of learners could be higher, and have increased the accountability of teachers and the leader of the sixth form to make further improvements. Learners engage fully in school life by helping younger pupils to develop their reading, by acting as subject ambassadors and by participating in a wide range of enrichment activities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the action taken so far to hold staff accountable for raising the achievement of pupils in English, particularly those who are known to be disadvantaged, and the achievement of pupils capable of achieving the very highest GCSE grades, becomes firmly embedded
- the good practice in teaching, leading and managing mathematics is shared fully with staff in the English department
- better-quality questioning by teachers challenges pupils' thinking and encourages more of them to respond during lessons
- teachers make better use of pupil profiles to provide more suitable learning tasks for pupils with special educational needs
- the higher expectations of students and increased accountability of staff leads to further improvement in the sixth form
- this ideal opportunity is taken to harness the full support of parents, carers and the local community to improve the school further still.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your senior leaders, staff responsible for safeguarding pupils, including maintaining the single central record, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, a group of Year 11 pupils and a group of learners in the sixth form. Together with senior leaders, we visited a range of subject areas to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. We also carried out a learning walk together to gauge the school's ethos and culture. We looked at a range of documents including records of attendance and behaviour, and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans. We considered 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, a further 79 freetext responses from parents, and 63 responses from staff.