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Derek Peuple
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Peuple

Short inspection of Park House School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2016, with Mark Bagust, Ofsted Inspector and David Simons, 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 the school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Pupils value their school and the nurturing environment. Their conduct is calm and orderly and they show courtesy to others. Pupils are punctual to lessons and behave well in them, forging positive relationships with teachers and engaging effectively in their learning. Leaders have placed a high emphasis on the importance of developing pupils into fully rounded adults. The promotion of pupils' social, spiritual, moral and cultural development is a real strength of the school. Many pupils engage in a wide range of clubs and activities. Learners in the sixth form contribute well to broader school life. You lead by example, ensuring that you and other staff contribute to the wider education system. The considerable achievements of pupils and staff are recognised and celebrated in your engaging magazine, 'Personal Best'.

When the school was last inspected, the inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour. The inspectors identified some areas for specific attention. One was to develop teaching so that it consistently enables pupils to deepen their understanding and make strong progress. A second was to raise attainment by ensuring that when evaluating teaching, leaders routinely consider the impact it has on the achievement of different groups of pupils. Leaders and governors have, in the main, been successful in addressing these points. Teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection, most notably in English, where leaders have addressed previous weaknesses and pupils' achievement is typically high. A few isolated pockets of weaker practice remain, which you are acutely aware of and are working to address. Leaders make

good use of the information they collect about pupils' attainment and progress to compare how disadvantaged pupils' achievement compares with others in the school and nationally. This has been key to your marked success in closing the achievement gaps between these groups. Subject leaders also make good use of assessment information to check and analyse the achievement of pupils with different starting points. However, senior leaders do not routinely pull this information together to gain an exact understanding of how well different pupil groups achieve in each subject and year over time. Leaders have also not defined their expectation for what they would consider to be good or outstanding achievement for each pupil group. As a result, they and governors do not have a really precise understanding of the impact of teaching on achievement. These are priorities for attention.

Provision in the sixth form also needs some attention. Students' achievement was average last year, having formerly been high. A key reason for this was that the proportion of sixth formers previously attaining the highest grades at GCSE has decreased in the last two years and teaching has not been fully adapted to accommodate this. Improved tracking and support for those who have fallen behind is helping reverse this decline, but more work is needed to ensure that teaching consistently provides the right level of challenge for learners with lower starting points. Further consideration is also needed of whether the current sixth-form curriculum caters really well for the range of learners enrolled.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Checks on the identity and suitability of staff are robust and well managed and recorded. You have made sure that all staff are fully aware of their safeguarding duties and receive appropriate training. The safeguarding governor, an experienced safeguarding professional, checks that school arrangements are in order. Governors also work with leaders to ensure that due consideration is given to broader safety matters such as ensuring that the site is suitably secure and measures are in place for responding to any security threat.

Pupils feel safe at school. They learn how to keep themselves safe online and know who to go to if they have any concerns. Incidents of bullying are uncommon and dealt with well. Leaders challenge any incidents of prejudice bullying effectively and such incidents are rare.

Inspection findings

- Governors are typically well informed about the school's performance. They know where there are weaknesses and they challenge leaders about these. Governors regularly look at information about pupils' achievement. However, they do not have an exact understanding of the achievement of each group of pupils in each subject over time. This is because leaders typically present detailed numerical information rather than a sharp analysis of what the information indicates.
- Leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. They gather useful information which enables them to identify strengths and areas for

development. They recognise there are isolated pockets of weaker teaching and are taking action to address these. However, leaders have not defined the impact teaching should have on the progress of different groups of pupils in each subject for it to be deemed good or outstanding. Consequently, leaders' evaluations of teaching, although broadly accurate, are not truly incisive.

- Leaders carefully track the progress of each pupil to ensure that any who fall behind receive the support they need to catch up.
- Leaders have effectively established a suitable approach to assessing and tracking pupils' progress to meet new national requirements.
- Leaders have made good use of pupil premium funding over time. As a result, gaps in achievement between these pupils and others in the school and nationally have narrowed significantly. Increasingly, disadvantaged pupils make strong progress.
- Leaders have effectively tackled weaker teaching in English. Pupils' achievement in English by the end of key stage 4 was outstanding in 2014 and 2015.
- Overall, progress and attainment by the end of key stage 4 has been in line with the national figure in 2014 and 2015. Standards have been maintained and pupils currently in the school typically make good or better progress.
- Pupils' overall progress in mathematics by the end of key stage 4 was good in 2015. However, the proportion of more-able and less-able pupils making strong progress was a little below the national figure. Similar outcomes are expected this summer. Instability in staffing in the mathematics department has played a major part. Encouragingly, leaders have now successfully stabilised staffing in the department. As a result, teaching in mathematics is strong. The most- and least-able pupils are receiving work at a suitable level of challenge and are typically making good progress.
- Learners' achievement at AS and A level was in line with the national average in 2015. This was a decline from 2014 and 2013, when it was above the national figure.
- Teaching in the sixth form is not consistently meeting the needs of learners with lower starting points. Better tracking and support for those falling behind is having a positive effect. School information indicates that a higher proportion of learners are on track to achieve well this year. Nevertheless, teaching in the sixth form needs some further attention.
- Provision in the sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes and supports learners well to develop into fully rounded adults. However, the courses on offer in the sixth form are almost entirely academic. As a result, the current curriculum is not entirely suitable for some of the increased proportion of learners admitted to the sixth form with lower starting points.
- Pupils' attendance has improved over the last three years. The overall proportion of pupils with high levels of absence has almost halved in that time and was better than the national figure in 2015. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils with high levels of absence has also halved. Leaders' more coordinated approach, improved tracking and support, together with better communication with feeder primary schools have all had an impact.
- Despite improvements in attendance, absence rates for disadvantaged pupils

and those who have special educational needs remain relatively high this year. Leaders are taking further suitable action to address this.

- The rate of fixed-term exclusions has dropped significantly over the last three years, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs. Permanent exclusions reduced by a half in 2015, having been notably high in 2013 and 2014. This lower level is set to be maintained this year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders define what would constitute good and outstanding achievement for different groups of pupils in each subject to aid incisive evaluation of teaching
- leaders and governors can see at a glance the progress groups of pupils are making in different subjects across the school over time so they can gain a precise understanding of the impact of work to raise achievement and use this to drive further improvement
- teaching in the sixth form consistently meets the needs of learners with different starting points
- learners who join the sixth form are able to study courses that cater for their needs and aspirations, taking into account their starting points.

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 Berkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, other leaders, teachers, the vice-chair of the governing body and five other governors, one who joined the meeting by conference call. We visited parts of 12 lessons. We also scrutinised a selection of pupils' mathematics and humanities work. I took account of 45 pupil survey responses, 52 staff survey responses and 78 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I considered 58 parent responses by free text or letter. Inspectors also spoke with pupils and sixth-form learners at lunchtime. Inspectors analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.