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Mr Richard Vasey
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Dear Mr Vasey

Short inspection of Ashfield Comprehensive School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2016 with Harkireet Sohel, 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 March 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 have invested the school with a strong sense of moral purpose. The staff and the pupils have both picked up on consistently delivered messages about being aspirational in all aspects of school work and life. That message is encapsulated in the school's motto, ASPIRE (Achievement, Secure, Pride, Individuals, Respect, Expectations), which was developed with the support of the pupils.

The school fosters in the pupils a sense of self-worth and of respect for others. The pupils show pride in their appearance and take care with their work. Typically, the pupils show positive attitudes to learning and, progressively, they develop a quietly expressed sense of ambition and purpose for the things that they want from their education. The extent to which that ambition is nurtured is apparent, for example, in the high proportion of the pupils going on to higher education or training on leaving the sixth form.

With the support of other leaders and managers, you have achieved a high level of consistency among the staff team, so that the staff convey a strong sense of mutual responsibility and of acting corporately. You, the governing body and the staff display an evident desire for and focus on continuous improvement. Some of the

improvements that you have made have been hard-won, requiring considerable determination.

You have worked systematically to tackle the areas for improvement from the last inspection of your predecessor school. You revised radically your approach to promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. The leadership of this aspect of the school's work has a much higher profile than previously. It has provided clearer direction, resulting in a broad range of opportunities for the pupils throughout the curriculum. Those opportunities have a positive effect on the pupils' attitudes, awareness, understanding and skills.

You have taken rigorous action to improve the quality of teaching, in order to turn around a legacy of historically weak progress by the pupils. The quality of teaching has improved and so the progress made by the pupils in lessons is secure, has improved overall and is currently good. The improvements that you have made required time, patience and persistence, but the inspection shows that you are now reaping the benefits from the difficult work that you have undertaken. As a result, the rate of pupils' progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 has quickened markedly this year and last.

The job is not completed, however, because the current level of achievement has yet to be sustained. You have a well-formed view of where variations remain in terms of differing rates of progress among groups of pupils, such as boys and more-able pupils, and between the performances of different subjects. Your conclusions are recorded clearly in your self-evaluation and appear, appropriately, as priorities for improvement in your carefully constructed school development plan. You have communicated to the staff unequivocally, effectively and accurately the aspects of the school that still need to be improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. The school's records for staff recruitment and for individual cases of concern are well kept. The staff are kept up to date about safeguarding matters through a well-organised and regular programme of training and briefings, for example about areas of national concern, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. They understand how to deal with disclosures and know and operate the school's clear and straightforward procedure for reporting any concerns.

The pupils feel safe at the school, including in the sixth form. They develop good knowledge about how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, as a result of learning opportunities provided through the school's curriculum. They report few concerns about bullying and say that, when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively. The pupils' attendance is above average and levels of persistent absence are below average. Levels of exclusions are well below average, although higher for disadvantaged pupils than for others.

Inspection findings

- Numerous comments from members of staff attest to the positive impact that you and senior leaders have at the school. Leaders, evidently, have a high profile around the school. As much as you have had to take difficult decisions, many members of staff feel well supported and as encouraged as the pupils to be aspirant in their work.
- Key leaders and managers understand clearly the school's priorities for improvement. They take action accordingly.
- The staff, leaders and managers are held to account rigorously through systematic procedures and frequent, robust discussions.
- The governing body plays an important and effective role in holding key leaders and managers to account; for example, as one of the leaders put it to me, 'They make us realise you can't make excuses'.
- Senior leaders track the progress of the pupils closely. The approach that they take to determining the pupils' current levels of achievement and evaluating the pupils' progress injects a good degree of challenge and ambition into the school's targets and, subsequently, for the staff and the pupils.
- You have reduced significantly the difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and others at the school, so that, overall currently, the two groups are much closer together. Disadvantaged pupils value the additional support that they are given and describe the teachers as going the extra mile to help them. Differences between their progress and others' are still evident, however, and vary between subjects.
- You use thorough processes for checking on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment well, including obtaining reports from external consultants and advisers. The processes result in you having a precise and accurate knowledge of variations between the performances of different subjects. You have, accordingly and appropriately, identified a need for improvements in English, art, computing and history.
- You have used the idea of 'target aspirational grades' (TAGs) effectively with the pupils. The TAGs help the pupils to understand their current achievement and provide them with a good sense of ambition, by helping them to identify where they want and need to get to next. The process is making a notable contribution to the currently good progress being made by the pupils.
- The current improvement at the school has been underpinned by notable successes in increasing attendance and in securing typically good behaviour.
- The pupils identify a range of experiences and lessons that they have had that have contributed well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development. For example, Year 9 pupils spoke about what they had learned from a theatre group visiting the school at the time of this inspection about how to stay safe online and to avoid potential exploitation.

- The broad and inclusive curriculum offered by the sixth form, along with high expectations apparent in lessons and tutorials, result in very positive attitudes to learning among the pupils and high levels of ambition regarding the things they wish to do after the sixth form.
- Sixth-form learners demonstrate high levels of self-discipline, during both structured times of the day and unstructured times, and are making good progress. Their achievement in vocational subjects, particularly, is strong.
- The school is well run and well organised. The school buildings and grounds are tidy and well respected.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the differences in the rates of progress made by groups of pupils are reduced further, particularly for boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able
- the variations in pupils' achievement between different subjects are reduced, including in English, art, computing and history.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors held meetings with you and the senior leadership team, representatives of the governing body, the designated persons responsible for safeguarding, and with some subject leaders. They made a series of visits to lessons jointly with you and other senior leaders. They examined examples of the pupils' work and looked at the teachers' assessments of that work. They held a range of discussions with a wide variety of pupils from the main school and the sixth form, informally when observing breaktimes and during lessons, and formally with groups of pupils. They observed the pupils' behaviour around the school at the start of the day, at breaktimes and during lessons. They looked at the views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and other surveys of parents'

views collected by the school. They looked also at the results of surveys of the views of pupils and the staff. They examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, behaviour policies, the latest achievement information for the school, including the school's data, the school's improvement plan and records relating to the pupils' behaviour.