

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



2 June 2016

Mr Patrick Harty
Headteacher
The Hemel Hempstead School
Heath Lane
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP1 1TX

Dear Mr Harty

Short inspection of The Hemel Hempstead School

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 2016 with Kevin Sadler, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The school's values of 'Responsibility, Respect and Relationships' are at the heart of the atmosphere at Hemel Hempstead School. You and your team prepare pupils to be courteous, considerate and capable young people, ready for the adult world.

The school has improved since the previous inspection in 2011, managing some challenges along the way. You have had a high staff turnover in some subject areas, most notably English, and this has reduced the progress that some pupils have made in the past. Despite this, you have maintained a steadfast focus on providing high-quality teaching. Staff who are new to the school, some of whom are new to teaching, are inducted and supported well. You are now fully staffed in English. In mathematics, staffing issues have been resolved through the admirable joint efforts of the team to support their colleagues. Your staff are improving standards for current pupils at a more rapid rate.

Pupils feel that they are well looked after, respected and belong at Hemel Hempstead School. Assemblies and personal and citizenship education lessons (PACE) teach pupils how to be responsible citizens and to recognise that differences between one another are strengths to be valued. You create many opportunities to give pupils a 'voice' in their own education. The well-organised house system and school council ensure that pupils develop strong relationships, a sense of community and, in addition to this, can raise any concerns that they may have. Pupils are 'glowing' in their praise for the staff, commenting that someone is always available to listen and support them when they need it. You regularly use pupils'

views to improve what happens in lessons. For instance, in modern foreign languages, where pupils requested more opportunities to develop their speaking skills, teachers have adapted their teaching to include this. Consequently, pupils are enthusiastic about their school life and feel that they are listened to.

The subjects on offer, the extra-curricular clubs, the specialist performance facilities and the visits programme, give pupils lots of chances to find a new skill or develop a passion for an area of their learning. Pupils, staff and parents talk about the excellent school productions and the significant numbers of pupils involved. Many pupils also develop a love of reading through events such as book challenges and author visits. Your 'Aspire' programme is increasing pupils' own aspirations about what they can and should be achieving. Pupils explain that this programme is helping them to see their potential, have a better work ethic and bigger ambitions for their education.

Leaders have brought significant improvements to the sixth form since the previous inspection. Learners achieve high standards and make good progress in their A-level studies. They are highly appreciative of the good teaching, feedback, additional one-to-one support and the wealth of opportunities they receive. They say that teachers 'go the extra mile' for them. The school has widened the subjects that it offers by working with other local schools and colleges in the 'consortium' so that learners can access a broad range of subjects. They have also provided transportation so that learners can focus on learning rather than the logistics of travelling to get to lessons. Learners are role models for the younger pupils in the school. Roles such as head boy and girl or the sixth-form executive committee are leadership roles to which younger year groups aspire. Leaders in the sixth form are unequivocal that ensuring that learners go on to the correct next stage of their career, training or education is just as important as the grades that they achieve. The 'destinations wall' is a celebration of the successes of past alumni as well as a reminder to current pupils about the opportunities open to them. Pupils are very well supported to apply for university, find employment or access further training facilities.

Leaders and governors have accurately identified the weaknesses of the school and know that there are areas where their work needs to be more precise. Their action planning does not always give strong guidance on how they will improve some areas of the school's performance. Leaders and governors also acknowledge that support plans for those pupils who have special educational needs or disability are not always specific or aspirational enough about academic achievement. This makes it difficult for teachers to meet pupils' learning needs in lessons. It also means that leaders' views on teaching can be a little overinflated as they do not fully take account of how well the needs of these pupils are being met.

Safeguarding is effective.

The record of checks of suitability of staff to work with children is fully maintained and meets all requirements. Training for staff is up to date and ensures that they know what to do if they have concerns. Staff are clear that the safety and welfare of pupils is paramount to the work that they do. Governors are well trained and

aware of their statutory responsibilities. They visit regularly to ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective. Additional work that has taken place on fencing around the school boundary now ensures that the school site is very secure. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through a well-thought-out curriculum which enables them to understand the risks both online and in their day-to-day life. They refer their worries to staff and are very confident that staff will deal with these effectively.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The school's self-evaluation identifies the correct areas for improvement. Leaders are taking effective action to improve the school. They are constantly refining their skills in how to monitor the progress of groups of pupils. However, some of their action planning is not specific enough to ensure that all staff are clear about what is expected of them or how to precisely support pupils.
- Overall key stage 4 attainment for pupils has been significantly above the national average for the last three years. Leaders and governors are explicit in their view that they must continue to maximise on the high prior attainment of many pupils from primary school. Professional conversations which challenge the status quo occur between senior leaders and those that they line manage. As a result, current pupils are making better progress and so the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and also those who have special educational needs or disability compared with their classmates are being reduced.
- Leaders have rightly focused on developing teaching in English. Despite the high turbulence in staffing over the last two years, those new to the team are inducted well and supported to improve their teaching. Leaders are using information strategically to support pupils who are underachieving. Consequently, current pupils are making progress in line with national averages.
- The most-able pupils, including those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are attaining significantly above the national average in the English Baccalaureate and are making progress broadly in line with national average in most subjects. More pupils achieve the top grades in triple science than others nationally. The improvements in English mean that current pupils are learning effectively and this is improving their overall progress in the school. More than this, the most-able pupils are very enthusiastic about their experience of the school. They take part in a range of extra-curricular clubs, enjoy the additional reading opportunities and appreciate the guidance they are given to see what university and careers they could aspire to. They say the support they receive is comprehensive and that staff are committed to ensuring that they have high ambitions and achieve them.
- Sixth-form progress is significantly higher than the national average at A and AS level, with very strong performance in dance, drama and information and communication technology (ICT). Teaching is effective and leads to learners making good progress. Learners are keen to achieve well, act on advice and improve their work. They dress smartly, act responsibly, take

part in the community and are role models for younger pupils. Most learners go on to study at university, although a significant minority acquire very appropriate post-18 apprenticeships, training or careers.

- Attendance is better than the national average and improving at a rapid rate for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability. Leaders use some of the additional funding that the school receives on their 'attendance, behaviour, intervention' programme which has had a direct impact on reducing the rates of absence and exclusion for these specific groups of pupils. As a consequence of improved attendance and behaviour, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability is improving.
- The curriculum gives pupils a breadth in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as well as opportunities to study more than one language. Alongside this, pupils develop a passion for their other subject areas, such as dance, drama and music. Extra-curricular opportunities are significant and lots of pupils participate in these.
- Pupils are positive about the support they receive to make decisions about their future. Year 7 pupils benefit from a number of transition and support events when they join the school. The thoroughly detailed guidance and mentoring that pupils in Years 9 and 11 receive when taking their next-step options ensures that they make appropriate course choices. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for life after school, and almost all of them go on to achieve success in their job, training or further education.
- Leaders review a range of information about pupils who have special educational needs or disability and create bespoke programmes that help pupils to make progress. One example is the additional literacy lessons which are improving pupils' reading, spelling and comprehension. However, the overall academic targets for pupils who have special educational needs or disability are not always sufficiently aspirational or specific enough. The guidance given to teachers is not always helpful to ensure that they are able to plan effectively to meet the varying needs of these pupils in their lessons.
- Leaders are too generous in their evaluation of teaching because, if teaching was as good as the school suggests, then outcomes for pupils would be much better. They do not always place enough emphasis on what teachers need to do to better meet the needs of pupils. Some staff are not receiving rigorous enough challenge on how they are providing suitable learning activities. This is especially true for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all actions in the school development plans are specific and give clear guidance to staff
- the monitoring of teaching focuses more on how well teaching is meeting the needs of different pupils to ensure that they make good progress
- the academic targets set for pupils who have special educational needs or disability are all equally ambitious and measurable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out on one day by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Ofsted Inspector. They scrutinised the record of checks of suitability of staff to work with children and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Meetings were held with school leaders, representatives of the governing body, middle leaders, staff and groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and the sixth form. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally around the school and observed them in lessons and at breaktime. Additional documentation was analysed, including reports to governors, the school's self-evaluation, achievement information and information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and welfare. Inspectors analysed 124 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) and 51 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.