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Mr Clive Rosewell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rosewell

Short inspection of Willowfield Humanities College

Following my visit to the school on 22 June 2016 with Lynne Isham, 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, building on strengths and tackling the areas identified for improvement to good effect. Consequently, the pupils' behaviour has remained a strength of the school and their progress has improved.

You became the substantive headteacher in April 2016 and since then you have been precise in identifying areas of the school's work that you recognise as needing further effort to improve. The school's leadership, including the governing body, are highly aspirational for pupils' personal development. You recognise that this is underpinned by the quality of teaching, learning and assessment with a strong focus on each pupil as an individual. Your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and has informed your plans for development effectively. You describe leaders as having a 'healthy impatience' for improvement, an attitude typified by their approach to their work.

You have drawn on external support through the local authority's challenge partnership, Waltham Forest's school effectiveness adviser and your alliance with Seven Kings Teaching School. These have been fruitful partnerships that have created good training opportunities and provided leaders with additional challenge to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. For example, the work that subject leaders have done with partnership colleagues has improved the reliability of

assessment information by checking that it is accurate and consistent. In some cases, for example in science, there remains work to do and leaders' plans draw on the successes seen in English and humanities as a model for improving the consistency of teaching and learning.

Last year's GCSE results demonstrated strong progress overall. However, you were disappointed that progress was not as strong in English and mathematics. Leaders worked quickly to address areas of weakness by establishing firm expectations for improvement that were shared and understood. These included improved leadership in mathematics and English; further development of the school's assessment system; clarity in the way teachers are held responsible for pupils' outcomes; and a comprehensive professional development programme.

The school moved into its new site at the beginning of this school year. Pupils, parents and staff expressed the view that this move has had a positive impact upon morale and ambition because learning is taking place in an environment that encourages very positive attitudes. This is reflected in pupils' good attendance, punctuality and consistently fewer exclusions than the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

Robust systems for checking staff's suitability to work in the school and procedures for safeguarding form the foundation of a safe environment where pupils can enjoy their education. Pupils, staff and parents agree that this school is a safe and welcoming place, where teachers put pupils' needs first and 'go to' people are well known and accessible if required. Staff have received training on issues such as child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation, in addition to regular safeguarding training. This enables them to confidently and swiftly respond should an issue arise. The atmosphere in the school is friendly and welcoming, reflecting the community ethos that leaders seek to create. This supports pupils' welfare as they feel confident about their safety, and know how to keep themselves and each other safe, including online.

Inspection findings

- From relatively low starting points pupils overall made good progress at GCSE last year. Disadvantaged pupils did better than their peers nationally and pupils who speak English as an additional language also performed strongly. This trend is set to continue with disadvantaged pupils projected to achieve outcomes that are better than their peers in school. While overall progress measures dipped slightly on the previous year, this was from a high position and current assessment information indicates that the long-term trend in improvement will continue.
- Progress made by the most able pupils was also strong last year but not as good as for other pupils. This is because not enough of the most able gain the very best grades at GCSE, which would represent strong progress from their higher starting points. In particular, the progress made by most-able disadvantaged pupils was relatively weak. Leaders recognise that not enough was done to stretch those pupils and build on the gains made by disadvantaged pupils more generally. There is an effective programme of

support in place for disadvantaged pupils. Current assessment information indicates that the most able disadvantaged pupils are making much better progress this year due to better targeted support and intervention.

- Most-able pupils' books demonstrate that challenging work is often provided which pushes them towards the best outcomes. However, this is variable because leadership in some subjects, such as science, has not been effective in ensuring sufficient consistency. While teachers' planning demonstrates an awareness of pupils' needs, this is not always reflected in the nature of their completed work.
- Leaders have implemented strategies that have improved pupils' progress in English and mathematics. The rate of improvement is quicker in English although work remains to be done to ensure that the most able do as well as they can. In mathematics, lower-attaining pupils make slower progress because the programme is developing. Pupils who arrive in school with lower than expected reading ages are part of a six-week programme that rapidly improves their literacy skills. This is reflected in their improved extended writing in other subjects, such as humanities. The impact of numeracy catch-up sessions is weaker.
- Teachers use questioning with skill, building on successful relationships with pupils who are keen to learn. Inspectors observed a number of examples of teachers asking questions that probed and challenged pupils' understanding, helping the class to make good progress. Where opportunities were missed to further capture pupils' imagination, some pupils were less engaged.
- The school's assessment policy is used effectively by most teachers who provide helpful feedback that pupils use to identify their mistakes and improve their work. When this is most effective, pupils' progress is rapid, sustained and evident in their literacy and numeracy. Where there remains variability, some feedback is too bland and pupils are left wondering how to improve. Where this is the case, the presentation of pupils' work tends to be weaker.
- The comprehensive professional development programme draws on leaders' expertise and external support. Staff morale is high, partly as a result of the supportive nature of the appraisal system which is responsive to need and clearly aligned to the teachers' standards.
- Pupils' personal development is enhanced by the range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including opportunities to participate in teams, clubs and competitions. Inspectors observed collaborative work where pupils in mixed-year group classes debated issues such as whether Churchill always demonstrated British values, and the impact on communities of intolerance and radicalisation. The nature of the work being done on the day of the inspection reflects the school's good ongoing work to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Governors know the school well, and understand their role in supporting and challenging leaders' evaluation of the school's performance. Governors' scrutiny of the effectiveness of pupil premium funding (additional government funding for looked after and disadvantaged pupils) is forensic and accurate. However, their challenge to leaders around the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is weaker. Governors have recognised this and recently designated a governor to focus on this area.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good enough progress. A review of this provision is currently underway, the outcome of which will inform leaders' actions. This includes the way other adults in lessons support pupils' learning. While pupils' academic performance and attendance are improving this year, the rate of improvement is not quick enough and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who are excluded for a fixed term is higher than for other pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well planned and led, accelerating pupils' progress and reducing exclusions
- teaching, learning and assessment improves in science, and across the school supports the most able to make quicker progress toward the highest outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Pupils in Years 7 to 9 were taking part in a range of activities run by teachers as part of citizenship week. Year 10 pupils were out on work experience and those in Year 11 were on exam study leave. Inspectors visited 10 sessions jointly with school leaders and scrutinised pupils' work with subject leaders. Inspectors met with senior leaders and members of the governing body including the chair, and held a telephone conversation with the local authority's school effectiveness adviser. Discussions were held with pupils both formally and informally. The views of 16 parents were considered via Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, in addition to inspectors meeting with four parents. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation including policies and procedures, the school's evaluation of its performance, and development planning. They also reviewed assessment and attendance information together with the minutes from governors' meetings. The staff and pupil surveys distributed as part of the inspection were analysed.