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14 September 2016

Mrs Natalie Willbourn  
Headteacher  
Orchards Academy  
St Mary's Road  
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Kent  
BR8 7TE

Dear Mrs Willbourn

### **Short inspection of Orchards Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2016 with Philip Storey, 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 February 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, supported by your leadership team, are intent on improving the life chances of the pupils in your care. This drives the work that staff do every day. You understand the needs of pupils well and work tirelessly to meet them. This is leading to rapid improvements in what pupils achieve during their time at Orchards Academy.

Since you arrived at the school in September 2013, you have acted with determination to raise standards and aspirations. You have led your staff well to establish a calm, purposeful environment for learning which is evident across the school. Standards of achievement have improved, and pupils make rapid progress in their learning from what are typically low starting points. The strong focus on improving literacy is helping pupils to access their learning more easily, as well as growing a love of reading.

You and your team have acted well on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The new strategy to improve the quality and impact of feedback to pupils is used consistently across the school. Pupils understand the purpose of the feedback they receive and value the way it helps them to improve their learning. Work with the local community is helping pupils to develop their leadership skills and take on responsibilities, such as organising a party for senior citizens. Pupils act

as ambassadors for their school and their peers. They say they would welcome the opportunity to play an even greater part in the life of the school. You have been relentless in reaching out to the local community, to work with parents and local primary schools. While there is further work to be done to gain the trust and confidence of some parents, the more positive perception of your school in the local area is reflected in the increasing numbers of pupils in the school. All of the places for admission into Year 7 for September 2016 have been filled.

You, other leaders and governors recognise the ongoing journey of your school and remain steadfast in your resolve to improve it further. You rightly identify the need to close further the achievement gaps for some groups of pupils, especially the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. While attendance has improved significantly, you continue to strive to make it even better, particularly for those who are frequently absent.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The safety and welfare of the pupils at the school is the number one priority for you and your staff. Staff are very effective in keeping pupils safe, and most feel the school does a good job in safeguarding their children. Pupils understand who is there to help them if they have any concerns. Leaders have established clear procedures for checking the suitability of staff working in the school. Access to the school site is managed carefully, with vigilant staff using well-practised routines when visitors arrive. Other safeguarding routines are fit for purpose. Staff are supported through regular training, including on how to prevent radicalisation. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are cared for well. School leaders keep high-quality records and work effectively with support services in the local community to meet these pupils' needs well.

Pupils have rich opportunities to learn about keeping healthy and safe, including when online. Pupils benefit from working with visitors as part of the personal, social and health education programme. Pupils feel well informed about how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

### **Inspection findings**

- Staff have consistently high expectations across the curriculum. Well-established routines help pupils to learn well and make increasingly good progress over time. Pupils know what they need to do to improve, and act on feedback.
- Pupils work well in most lessons, applying themselves to the tasks set by the teacher. They generally show pride in the work they produce. Occasionally pupils are not challenged enough by the questions they are asked or the work they are set. This prevents them from making more rapid progress over time and sometimes leads to learning time being lost or pupils losing focus in lessons, which some pupils report is a concern.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress from their starting points by the end of Year 11. They make more rapid progress during key stage 4 than they do during key stage 3, when they make

less progress than their peers. They achieve an increasing range of qualifications that equip them well for the future. Leaders invest in specialist staff and training to help pupils achieve well. Teaching assistants with specific skills or areas of responsibility provide high levels of support for pupils.

- Leaders have strengthened the curriculum so that pupils can choose from a wider range of subjects at GCSE. More pupils now learn a modern foreign language than was the case in the past.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment effectively. The information they collect is used to identify appropriate training and support for teachers, which is reducing variability and strengthening the quality of teaching across the school.
- Pupils make good progress by the end of Year 11 across a range of subjects. Externally moderated school information shows that pupils who have just completed key stage 4 have made strong progress from when they joined the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils are catching up with their peers in some year groups, but leaders recognise that this is not yet happening consistently and rapidly across the school.
- Leaders have established a clear behaviour code for the school community. Pupils behave well moving around the site and are courteous and respectful to adults and each other. Pupils agree that behaviour outside of lessons is good. Most say that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively when it happens.
- Leaders' high expectations, careful monitoring and prompt actions are improving the attendance of all groups of pupils. Overall attendance is now above the national average. A significant proportion of pupils remain persistently absent from school, but leaders' actions have more than halved this number over the past year.
- The percentage of pupils excluded from school for a fixed period of time has increased recently, as an appropriate response to a change in the school's context. Exclusions remain below the national average, and permanent exclusions are rare. School leaders recognise the need to continue to reduce the proportion of pupils who are excluded from school.
- Leaders are held increasingly to account for the difference they make to pupils' progress. Extra help for pupils who need to catch up is put in place quickly, helping them to make more rapid progress.
- Governors are well informed about the progress of different groups of pupils within the school. They recognise where it is not as strong for some and challenge leaders to take appropriate action.
- The multi-academy trust provides effective support to help leaders improve the school and share governance expertise.
- The 16 to 19 study programme provides effectively for the small number of students in the sixth form. Students follow vocational routes and appreciate the clear support and feedback they receive which helps them to make good progress. Students participate in good-quality work experience which closely

matches their needs and helps them decide what their next steps will be when they leave school. Leaders are working with the trust to increase the range of courses and qualifications offered to pupils at the end of Year 11.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning are strengthened further so that they become consistently strong across the school
- they evaluate carefully the difference the pupil premium funding is making to disadvantaged pupils so that their progress can be accelerated to close the gap with their peers further.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Inspectors visited 14 lessons across a range of subjects, more than half of them jointly with school leaders. An inspector was also invited to attend the final part of a catering competition in the technology department.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, governors, a representative from the multi-academy trust, the attendance officer and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including the school's self-evaluation and action plan, attendance and exclusion figures, information about pupil progress and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors checked the school's single central record and safeguarding procedures, and reviewed information on the website.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons about their learning and looked at examples of their work.
- Inspectors also considered 23 responses to Parent View and 21 written responses, as well as feedback from parental consultation carried out by school leaders. Inspectors took account of 36 responses to the staff questionnaire.