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Terry Millar  
Head of School  
The Howard School  
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Dear Mr Millar

### **Short inspection of The Howard School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 2016 with Steve Baker, 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 November 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since you arrived at the school in April 2016, you identified quickly the strengths of the school and the areas to improve most rapidly. You have clear ambition for the school to become even better, and you are supported by your staff in building purposefully on the firm foundation that was already in place.

The school is a calm and orderly environment, where pupils and students attend regularly and feel safe. Pupils and students are respectful of each other and their teachers, and work amidst a culture of acceptance. Staff know pupils and students as individuals, and provide them with support that is appropriate to their different needs. Almost all parents would recommend the school to another parent, and report that their children feel safe and happy at the school.

Since the predecessor school was inspected in November 2013, leaders have addressed the areas identified for improvement, alongside other emerging priorities. A clear focus on staff development has improved the consistency of pupils' learning experience across a range of subjects, although leaders know where further improvements are needed and work with focus and determination to address this.

Pupils are encouraged to work with increasing independence, and opportunities have been introduced to support them in completing work outside of lessons, both during and beyond the school day. Pupils appreciate the resources and support available to them, and say that they benefit from extra help that teachers give them willingly, and from being able to work collaboratively with their peers during lunchtimes and after school.

Following a decrease in overall outcomes in 2015, standards achieved at GCSE and A level have risen again in 2016. Pupils make good progress across an increasingly wide range of subjects, although there is some variation in the progress of some groups of pupils by the end of Year 11. Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress compared with other pupils nationally, although they do not consistently make as much progress as their peers in school. Sixth form students achieve well in academic and vocational courses, making good progress across a variety of subject areas by the end of Year 13.

You recognise that there is further work to do to make your school even better. Some pupils, particularly the most able, could make even more progress than they currently do from their starting points. The information you gather about how well pupils and students are doing could be more robust and used more strategically. This would ensure that future actions and extra support for pupils happens in a timely fashion. The shared motivation to improve is evident across the staff, and this will help to maintain current momentum and keep raising standards for pupils and students.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leaders take appropriate measures to keep pupils and students safe. Teaching and support staff are trained regularly and understand their responsibilities. The school site is now secure during the day. Pupils know who to talk to if they have concerns, and are confident that they will be helped. They learn how to keep themselves safe, including online.

The trust supports the school in ensuring that appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies are in place and reviewed regularly. Records relating to children who staff feel may be at risk are kept carefully, and attendance staff keep a watchful eye on pupils who are at risk of going missing from education. Leaders work closely with support beyond the school to make sure that pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable get the extra help they need.

The school carries out appropriate checks in relation to staff recruitment, and keeps a suitably detailed single central record of these checks. Relevant staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment practices, to ensure the quality of this process.

## Inspection findings

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Leaders understand the needs of individual pupils and the barriers to their learning. Leaders check the progress of these pupils meticulously and regularly and identify further work to move their learning on more quickly.
- Leaders have reviewed the work that additional adults do to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders know that being supported effectively in their subject lessons makes a big difference to these pupils' engagement and progress. Developing the work of teaching assistants in the classroom is helping pupils to accelerate their progress and improve their behaviour. As a result, the number of exclusions relating to this group of pupils is reducing well.
- Leaders and the attendance officer are determined to improve the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although some of these pupils do not come to school as regularly as they should, their attendance is improving across the school as a result of the persistence of staff.
- A clear approach to staff development meets the different needs and aspirations of the teachers in the school. This contributes to high-quality teaching across the range of subjects. Where needed, leaders help and challenge teachers to improve their practice, and can show that this makes a difference to pupils' learning.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. The frequent and regular presence of senior leaders around the school during the day helps to keep the learning environment calm. It also enables leaders to identify and intervene quickly where teaching is not meeting the high standards expected across the school.
- Where teaching is most effective, learning activities are carefully structured to challenge pupils with different starting points, and to encourage them to work increasingly independently. Sometimes this is not done as effectively and the pace of learning is not as rapid as it should be.
- Pupils read fluently and with comprehension appropriate to their starting points. Those who arrive at the school needing to catch up in English and mathematics receive structured support, particularly to improve their reading quickly, so that they can access the wider curriculum. This support is helping pupils to make accelerated progress over the course of Year 7.
- Leaders have reviewed the high proportion of exclusions from the last academic year to identify the underlying factors. Action taken as a result has already reduced exclusions by almost half over the first part of this academic year. The high proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities that were previously evident in the exclusion figures are also reducing.
- Leaders know the disadvantaged pupils well and work closely with them to remove barriers to their learning. The readiness with which pupils accept practical support shows the sensitivity with which it is offered.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well across a broad range of subjects. In 2016, by the end of Year 11, pupils made good progress compared with others who have the same starting points nationally, and progress in mathematics was stronger than it has been in the past. Pupils who are disadvantaged do not consistently make as strong progress as their peers across all of their subjects by the end of Year 11. The work of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is of a comparable standard and quality to that of their peers.
- New leadership of the 16 to 19 study programme has invigorated this area of the school. Leaders understand what has led to previous underachievement and have been prompt in addressing these issues, ensuring that students are all placed on courses appropriate to their ongoing development.
- In 2016, students in the sixth form achieved much improved outcomes at the end of academic and vocational courses. While some variation exists across subjects, overall progress is good across the range of courses offered. Students who needed to improve their GCSE results in English and mathematics made strong progress in these subjects compared with their peers nationally.
- Leaders help post-16 students to develop their independence and play a greater role in the life of the school. They act as mentors to younger pupils, with the aim of increasing the proportion of pupils who choose to stay on into the sixth form at the end of Year 11.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further refine their practice, so that learning activities challenge pupils, especially those who are most able, to make even more rapid progress from their different starting points
- teachers and leaders sharpen the quality and use of information about how well pupils are doing, so that it drives ongoing support and improvements more efficiently.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Information about the inspection

- Inspectors worked alongside senior leaders to visit lessons across key stages 3 to 5, to evaluate whether consistently good teaching is leading to good learning and progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Inspectors considered the effectiveness of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by looking at documentation, talking to leaders about how these pupils are supported, and reviewing some case studies.
- Inspectors met with school leaders and attendance staff to review behaviour and attendance information, to see if high exclusion rates are falling and attendance is improving for key groups of pupils.
- Inspectors worked with leaders of the 16 to 19 study programme, to review whether outcomes are improving for this group of students.
- Inspectors considered the progress being made by disadvantaged pupils, and how extra funding from the government is being used by school leaders to help these pupils, and those who arrive in Year 7 needing to catch up in English and mathematics, to make rapid progress. Inspectors reviewed the quality of disadvantaged pupils' work and listened to some of them reading as part of visits to lessons.
- Inspectors checked safeguarding arrangements by looking at a range of policies, talking to pupils and staff, and checking the single central record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of other documentation and met with you, your two deputy headteachers and the chief executive officer of the trust to determine how you and other leaders are helping the school to improve. We took into account the views of pupils, teachers and parents which were gathered via online surveys, and met with two small groups of pupils.