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Robert Wyatt
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Dear Mr Wyatt

Short inspection of Grange Park School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 2016 with Rosemary Keen, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, have created a culture of high expectations of pupils' achievements. Consequently, your leadership has engendered a strong bond between staff who continually seek ways to improve the education pupils receive at the school. The vast majority of staff feel valued and well supported to develop professionally because you are adept at identifying talent and enabling staff to flourish. As a result, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are ambitious for all pupils and students to exceed expected progress in every year group and in each subject. Assessment systems are used effectively to track the progress that pupils make, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. This helps you to identify dips in pupils' progress or in subject areas. For instance, you know that still more work needs to be done to help pupils make the same rapid progress in mathematics as they do in English.

Nearly all pupils exceed expected progress from their various starting points. Progress in English is particularly strong throughout key stages 3 and 4. A very small number of pupils make less than expected progress, more commonly in mathematics. Because of the strong progress pupils make, they are able to access an increasing range of accreditation, and in some subjects, such as science and art, standards are rising year on year. Additionally, you have ensured that teachers' judgements on how well pupils are doing are validated through external

moderation. You recognise that the way in which key stage 5 students' progress is tracked needs refining so that you are assured that they too are making sufficient progress, to build strongly, and improve upon, their key stage 4 accreditations.

The school makes a dramatic difference to pupils' personal development and behaviour from the time they start in the youngest classes to when they leave at the end of their time in college. You provide extremely well for pupils' welfare and safety. The school enables pupils to access learning and achieve within a safe environment so that they blossom into young adults who are better equipped to face the challenges that life may bring.

During their time at your school, pupils quickly develop skills for life that help to prepare them for their onward journey, especially through access to college which helps students to mature as young adults and take increased responsibility for themselves. Staff supporting students in key stage 5 gradually withdraw their support to allow students to achieve more and more on their own. Students respond to this challenge with pride.

You and your staff have worked diligently to meet the recommendations given to the school at the time of the previous inspection. There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection so that it is now consistently good throughout the school. This is because you rigorously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, and support all adults to improve their practice. You have provided high-quality training to improve staff's skills. Supported by governors, you have taken the actions necessary to secure stronger teaching so that pupils' achievement and their access to a range of subjects continue to rise.

Post-16 students are taught by college staff. You are not in a position to monitor the teaching of college staff but you keep a close eye on how well students achieve at college. This, together with the feedback from your own staff who support these students, gives you an overview of students' progress. However, you do not have as much detailed information on students' progress as you would like so that you can be sure that students in key stage 5 are building securely on their previous accreditations.

Governors now make a substantial contribution to the school's capacity to improve further. You describe the governing body as 'transformed'. Governors challenge leaders and ask searching questions of them to make sure that they are continually seeking ways to make the school even better. Governors make themselves available to hear the opinions of staff, pupils and parents because their opinions matter to them. It is noteworthy that governors share your high expectations for pupils and engage in activities that help them to find out for themselves how well pupils are achieving both academically and in terms of their personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Governors undertake training to ensure that they can carry out their responsibilities well, particularly in relation to safeguarding. Furthermore, governors are attentive to your well-being, as they are for the pupils in their care.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors have cultivated a safe culture in which pupils prosper. This is underpinned by the depth of knowledge staff have about all pupils and students, who are nurtured and encompassed by care.

Scrupulous checks are made on adults when they work or volunteer at the school to make sure that they are suitable to work with children and young adults. All staff have completed appropriate training according to their responsibilities. This includes training on safeguarding issues that reflect the most recent statutory guidance and legislation. As a result, staff understand the guidance and are confident to undertake their duty to protect pupils. They do it exceptionally well.

Pupils feel safe in school and understand how to keep themselves safe online. They know that staff and their parents are available to help them if they are worried. Staff and parents overwhelmingly agree that pupils are safe and well looked after at school. Pupils value the friends they make while they are at school and intermingle seamlessly and appropriately with pupils from other year groups, especially in unstructured times such as breaktime. Pupils who find large spaces and socialisation difficult are supported very well to grow in confidence and to develop important communication and interaction skills. The school's Boxer dog, Bel, also helps pupils to develop these essential life skills.

Inspection findings

- Admirably, you are committed to providing support beyond your own school. You have generously shared the expertise of your staff to affect the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities within the local area. In 2015, the school achieved Autism Accreditation. This recognised the excellent knowledge and understanding of autism spectrum disorder that you and your staff have that enables the school to strive towards even better educational provision for pupils and students who have autism spectrum disorder. The deputy headteacher also contributes to this goal and supports local teachers on their journey towards becoming outstanding practitioners. You are keen to continue to share what you have achieved at Grange Park School further to benefit the wider community.
- Leaders, including governors, are self-reflective and therefore focused on what needs to be done to improve the school further. However, the school improvement plan lacks a clear focus on what impact actions will have on improving the school and measureable milestones by which to gauge the progress that the school is making towards achieving its ambitions. This would be enhanced by greater evaluation of the wide range of information available to leaders to hone in precisely on areas for improvement.

- You have recognised the benefits of delegated leadership as a tool for elevating the overall effectiveness of the school. Senior and middle leaders, some of whom are new to their role, are taking increasing responsibility to forge improved standards in the subjects and areas for which they are responsible. They are undertaking leadership training to help them improve their ability to impact on the strategic development of the whole school, but some still have more to learn before they are able to assist you fully in improving the school further.
- During this inspection, most pupils were absorbed in their learning, because work is well matched to their ability, and support staff skilfully help pupils to access their learning with growing confidence. The longer pupils have been at Grange Park School, the more positive and engaged in learning they become. This is testament to the encouraging and aspiring culture and atmosphere within the school that has been fostered by all staff.
- Pupils' attendance in key stage 3 and key stage 4 is much better than the national average for special schools. Very few pupils have too many days off school. This contributes to the good progress that they make. Attendance for students who attend college is not as strong. Colleges now report students' attendance on a daily basis to the school which gives leaders greater capacity to intervene quickly to address poor attendance. Leaders have ensured that a range of strategies are in place to encourage good attendance. Leaders doggedly pursue support for students whose poor attendance raises concerns about their overall safety and well-being.
- Staff understand and consistently apply the school's expectations regarding appropriate behaviour and conduct. Staff are calm and resilient in their approach to helping pupils to manage their behaviour and emotions more effectively. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and respond to guidance from staff. Underneath this is a foundation of positive relationships and staff who know the needs of each child exceptionally well. For these reasons, the number of exclusions and behavioural incidents is declining. You record and analyse behavioural incidents thoroughly but your systems are not yet giving you a clear picture of how to diminish behavioural incidents still further.
- Teachers plan lessons that engage and motivate pupils and meet their needs, including the least able, the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. In mathematics, for example, some pupils learned about place value while other pupils grappled with algebra. Most teachers impart their subject knowledge well so that pupils are enthused to learn and consequently improve their knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of subject areas. Teachers commonly ask searching questions that deepen pupils' understanding. In a science lesson, pupils ably answered questions about the reactivity of a range of metals while watching the teacher demonstrate the reaction of water on calcium. The focus on health and safety was exemplary. Therefore, pupils were able to conduct experiments to assess the way a variety of metals react when acid is introduced. Later, pupils excitedly spoke about how the copper strips had dissolved.

- Additional government funding given to the school to support disadvantaged pupils, known as pupil premium, and the funding allocated to help pupils who did not reach expected standards by the end of Year 6, are allocated thoughtfully to eligible pupils. However, greater attention needs to be given to evaluating the difference government funds are making on pupils' progress to make certain that funds are used in the most effective way possible and to plan for the future.
- The vast majority of disadvantaged pupils make greater than expected progress in English and mathematics. Their progress is strongest in English which reflects the school's overall progress information for all pupils. The small numbers of disadvantaged pupils who do not make expected progress in mathematics are quickly identified and interventions are put in place to support them. Additional support is making a positive difference, especially in English. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is lower than for other pupils in the school. Leaders work closely with parents whose children do not attend school as often as they should so that pupils are not disadvantaged by poor attendance.
- All Year 7 pupils have made greater than expected progress in English. However, in mathematics, only two thirds have made the same good progress. Nevertheless, strong progress is helping pupils to diminish differences between their achievement and the expected levels of attainment for pupils of their age.
- The most able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Their learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. During a mathematics lesson, most-able pupils discussed with inspectors the reasons why they felt their work was 'tricky', and eloquently spoke about the range of accreditation they hope to achieve.
- The most able pupils make more than expected progress and access a range of GCSEs. Some pupils achieve GCSE accreditation before they reach Year 11. Commendably, leaders have made it possible for the most able pupils to access accreditation in subjects in which they excel, for example, in history and art. Leaders have invested heavily in staffing to ensure that these opportunities are available to all pupils. In addition, leaders have developed links with local schools to make certain that the most able pupils reach the standards of which they are capable. However, leaders do not track the progress of these pupils as a group across a range of subjects to develop a strategic vision for this group of pupils and students.
- Importantly, pupils in Year 9 are given the opportunity to make choices about which subjects they would like to pursue in key stage 4 towards accreditation. This relatively recent change allows pupils to follow their interests and increasingly enjoy their learning. A parent expressed the value that this has given to their child: 'The school has encouraged him to work on his strengths and I've seen him become more happy to do his homework and take pride in his achievements.'

- By the time students leave the school, they achieve a range of GCSEs, entry-level certificates, functional skills awards and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. Some students improve on their accreditation while they are attending college. For instance, students who achieve a GCSE in English and mathematics at grades D to G are expected to work towards a grade C during key stage 5. Over the last three years, the number of GCSEs that each pupil has achieved has steadily increased.
- Post-16 students attend colleges and placements that work in partnership with the school. They attend Mid Kent College at two separate locations, and Hadlow College, White Rocks Farm, Pepenbury, and Rowhill School. This has increased the accredited outcomes to which students have access. Leaders work hard to make certain that students' pathways allow them to follow their interests and build on their strengths. Furthermore, students have numerous opportunities to develop life skills that help them to become more independent, for instance by using public transport.
- Leaders work hard to provide opportunities for students to participate in work experience that reflects their interests and aspirations. They are given impartial careers advice and are spoken to individually so that their own preferences are captured and as far as possible provided for.
- The school has a praiseworthy record of facilitating successful onward journeys for students. The proportion of students who go on to participate in further education or employment is above the national average. The next step would be to track students' destinations to measure how successful students are at sustaining their chosen pathway, and to use this information to further strengthen the quality of provision provided to post-16 students.
- Nearly all parents are overwhelmingly positive about the impact that the school has had on their children's lives, which in turn has positively impacted on their own, believing that now, 'anything is possible'. A parent summed up the views of many by saying: 'All the teachers are so well equipped with the knowledge of my son's disabilities that it puts him and me at ease.'
- Leaders have proactively sought to work in collaboration with other schools to continuously seek ways to improve the school. Grange Park School is part of the Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT), which is a group of special schools working together that aspire to provide world-class educational provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders plan to increase work with KSENT schools, for instance, to further validate the judgements made by the school relating to how well pupils achieve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that the wealth of information available to leaders is evaluated and the impact of initiatives and interventions is measured so as to inform school improvement planning
- remain focused on improving pupils' progress and achievement in mathematics to match those made in English
- develop the roles of middle leaders so that they are able to contribute fully towards meeting the school's strategic vision and the school's onward journey towards outstanding
- continue to strengthen post-16 provision so that students' attendance improves and students' progress demonstrates that outcomes and accreditation at key stage 4 are built upon.

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

Abigail Birch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and other leaders, those responsible for safeguarding including the school business manager, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. We visited classes across key stages 3 and 4 with yourself and the deputy headteacher. Inspectors spoke to a member of staff who supports key stage 5 students who attend a local college. Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons, and met with them formally to gather their views. Inspectors looked at their work in a range of subjects alongside middle leaders. We took account of 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and six written contributions by parents. Inspectors spoke to two parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors took into account the views of staff by considering the 20 responses they made through the voluntary staff survey and met with four members of staff to discuss their own experience of working at the school. We analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about the achievement of pupils and students, school policies and safeguarding procedures. We also discussed with you the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

Inspectors focused on how effectively leaders, including governors, have continued to improve the school's effectiveness. Inspectors also focused on how well leaders have secured consistently strong teaching across the school and in a range of subjects to facilitate better outcomes for pupils. Inspectors examined the progress pupils have made from their variable starting points, including the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged. Inspectors particularly focused on mathematics. Inspectors also explored the use and impact of additional government funds, such as pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and eligible pupils in Year 7. In addition, inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding and how well pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain.