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Dear Mr Thompson

Short inspection of Mill Hill County High School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 2016 with Joan Deslandes, Her Majesty's 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 March 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, the associate headteacher, leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and strive hard to make necessary improvements. You are rightfully proud of the talents that your young people possess and provide an extensive range of opportunities for them to perform and compete. Provision in music and dance is particularly strong. Pupils of all abilities are encouraged to participate in a wealth of extra-curricular activities and many do so with enthusiasm.

You and your team have addressed the areas for development identified at the previous inspection. You carefully check the quality of teaching across all subjects and intervene quickly should it fall below your high expectations. For example, you recognised that more needed to be done in science to secure good outcomes. You appointed new staff and focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, pupils are beginning to make more progress in this area.

You identified that disadvantaged pupils do not make the same good progress as other pupils nationally and in the school. Consequently, last year, the whole-school focus was on improving outcomes for this group of pupils. Information provided by the school on the 2016 examination results indicates that the progress made by this group increased significantly as a consequence. However, you and your leaders know that more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils within this group make significant progress from their starting points.

Pupils are enthusiastic and self-motivated learners. They have high aspirations, are keen to do well and work hard. The school is a harmonious and diverse learning environment where pupils show respect and tolerance towards each other and staff. Pupils are genuinely excited by the range of extra-curricular activities and trips that are on offer. Pupils are dedicated both to their studies and achieving excellence in their chosen interests, be it the school orchestra, the cadet force or school sports teams. The cultivation of these interests ensures that pupils become well-rounded individuals, and are effectively prepared for life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is seen as a high priority across the main school site and at the separate Oak Hill Campus. Procedures for checking on the suitability of staff to work at the school are robust. Records are detailed and compliant with regulations. All pupils, staff and visitors are clear about which staff are the designated safeguarding officers and what they should do if they are concerned. Staff have received relevant training regarding potential risks and warning signs. These include: issues to do with cyber-bullying, sexting and internet security; and the threat of radicalisation, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation linked to gang involvement.

The school is large but pupils have dedicated teams of staff who nurture their interests and support them emotionally and academically. They are given advice on how to keep themselves safe, both in school and in the wider community. Staff are open about the strict rules around uniform and conduct, though emphasise that self-regulation is also expected. Consequently, the atmosphere around the site is orderly and purposeful. The parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, endorsed the view that pupils are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- You and other school leaders have an accurate understanding of areas that need further development. You know that the priority needs to be identified groups of pupils. These include those who are disadvantaged and those whose attainment on entry is below average. You have also identified the highest attaining pupils whom you believe could achieve even higher outcomes at the end of Years 11 to 13. You and your team carefully track the progress of all pupils across the school and are introducing strategies to overcome potential barriers to pupils' learning.

- The governing body is experienced and passionate about the future success of the school. Governors have an accurate understanding of the quality of education provided by the school. They are proud of the opportunities provided for pupils, but know that more needs to be done for some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. They are proactive in discussing with school leaders the impact of actions taken so far and in holding them to account. They fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- The majority of pupils arrive in Year 7 with attainment levels above the national average. By the end of Year 11, the majority make good progress from their starting points and achieve highly across the full range of subjects. Over half achieve the English Baccalaureate, which is above the national average.
- A small minority of pupils arrive with lower starting points. Access to different curriculum pathways and a focus on improving their literacy and numeracy skills ensure that they catch up with other pupils. Their progress is carefully monitored, and leaders act quickly should they begin to fall behind other pupils; they remain a target group for the school.
- The library is a busy and thriving place. Pupils of all ages, including students studying in the sixth form, access a range of books, media and journals that aid them in their studies. Pupils were keen to share their love of reading with the inspector, discussing their choice of books and reading coherently and competently.
- Middle leaders value the support that they are given to monitor effectively the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. They believe the flexibility they are given to manage their teams and try out new ideas allows them to accelerate developments within their own areas of responsibility.
- There is a comprehensive induction programme in place for those new to teaching which is highly valued. An open culture of more experienced staff sharing their best practice helps these teachers to develop their skills and confidence.
- Leaders ensure that students in the large and oversubscribed sixth form have the academic aptitude to be successful on their chosen courses. A large number go on to their first choice of university, with many accessing prestigious Russell Group universities. As in the main school, a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities ensures that students' skills and interests are cultivated. However, while many achieve high grades, progress on some courses is still not good enough. School leaders are well aware of this and have plans in place to address the situation in some subject areas, notably science.
- The day-to-day leadership at the Oak Hill Campus, a specialist resource provision, is good. A focus on extending the curriculum offer, providing courses that result in accreditation and improving the quality of teaching and learning is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Leaders are working hard to improve pupils' attendance still further and much attention is given to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on disadvantaged and less able pupils enables more to make substantial progress from their starting points
- teaching in the sixth form across all subjects is of the highest quality and enables students to make good progress and achieve highly
- improvements within the science department continue, so that teaching across all year groups results in good progress being made by all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Matthews
Her Majesty's Inspector

The inspectors agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the provision for the least able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the progress of disadvantaged students
- the quality of the 16–19 provision.

The inspectors carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection.

Inspectors met with you, the associate headteacher, other leaders and teachers. They met with the vice-chair and two others from the governing body. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on the progress of current pupils, outcomes from the 2016 examinations and the single central record. Inspectors discussed the school's evaluation of its own performance and looked at presented information. Inspectors visited the Oak Hill Campus to talk to leaders, discuss their safeguarding arrangements, look at progress information and visit lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the inspection. They visited lessons in science and English and heard some pupils read.