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1 February 2017

Mr Steven Dool
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dool

Short inspection of Neston High School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Tim Long, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and ensured that it continues to improve. As headteacher, you have created a very clear leadership structure. All leaders, managers and teachers are fully aware of their responsibilities. You and the governors hold all staff to account with considerable rigour. Teachers and leaders at all levels are enthusiastic and ambitious. You ensure that they have very high expectations of themselves. Similarly, high standards are expected of pupils in both their academic achievement and behaviour.

Pupils' comments about the school are very positive. They are happy and feel very well looked after. They consider the relationships between themselves and staff to be excellent. Pupils are appreciative of all that the staff do for them in terms of supporting them academically, emotionally and providing excellent opportunities for personal development.

Around the school, there are many examples of where teaching is leading to excellent pupil achievement. You have instilled in the staff a desire to do the best they can. At the last inspection, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their attendance were identified as areas for improvement. These aspects have improved, but there is still work to be done before disadvantaged pupils perform as well as their peers.

You have clear expectations of how all staff should develop pupils' literacy skills and

pupils' ability to write well and at length. While many teachers are rising to this challenge, not enough are to make a considerable difference.

Despite there being a labyrinth of corridors and isolated parts of the school, pupils move around it calmly and responsibly. Older pupils take care of younger ones. In classes pupils participate well. They express their opinions considerately and confidently.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Procedures to ensure that pupils are safe, including the recruitment of suitable staff, are rigorous.

Pupils are taught successfully how to look after themselves and their peers. This includes a very wide range of situations, including while using social media and in their community. Relationships between your staff and pupils are excellent, so pupils have many adults they can confide in or turn to for advice.

Staff are frequently and well trained in a wide range of aspects of safeguarding and child protection. Potential child protection incidents are treated with considerable professionalism. The school works well with other agencies to ensure that children are safe.

Inspection findings

- Pupils at this school receive a very good and well-rounded education. Pupils achieve well, behave well and take part enthusiastically in the many opportunities provided to enhance their personal development and leadership skills.
- You and the governing body consult very well and respond to the views of pupils and parents. In addition, you and the governing body analyse the impact of the work of the school on pupil achievement and their personal development in considerable depth. These consultations and analyses provide you with a well-informed view of the school and this enables you to target improvements specifically where they are most needed.
- The governing body provides excellent guidance and leadership of the school. They have a wide range of high-level skills, including strategic institutional management. Governors are very well informed and are perfectly capable of holding you and other school leaders to account.
- Strong leadership exists at all levels because you have systematically developed high-quality leadership skills throughout your school. This results in high levels of professional trust and respect for leaders. They have the skills and the opportunities to improve the aspects of the school for which they are responsible. As a result of high-quality leadership, all aspects of the school are improving and there is strong capacity within the leadership team for this improvement to continue.
- Achievement of pupils has been consistently good over many years. Achievement

in English is the envy of other departments and these leaders are striving to match the success found in English. Pupils achieve well in other departments too, including art and practical design, physical education, religious education and media in the sixth form. The quality of teaching in mathematics is not as good as you want it to be, and you are taking effective steps to improve it.

- Most-able pupils achieve well and this includes disadvantaged most-able pupils. In 2016, middle-ability and low-ability disadvantaged learners did not make similar progress to other pupils nationally. The reasons for this are complex. However, their weaker attendance was certainly a key factor. Since the last inspection, the differences in performance between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are diminishing and their attendance is improving.
- The school's 2016 headline progress scores suggested a small drop in performance by low- and middle-ability students. This was as a result of some of these pupils following part of a curriculum that did not contribute to this measure of progress. The curriculum has been modified for these pupils currently in school. Your monitoring suggests that they are on track to achieve well. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been strong over many years.
- The 2016 achievement of students in the sixth form dipped. However, those responsible for leading the sixth form have taken decisive action to address this successfully. Students say that the more rigorous monitoring of their progress and planned discussions with subject specialists and learning mentors help them significantly to improve their work. Students are expected to take advantage of the many opportunities to develop their leadership skills, and almost all do. Students are ambitious and are given very good information, advice and guidance on how to fulfil their aspirations. As a result of strong achievement, good personal development and well-informed career planning, students are very well prepared for their next steps in education.
- There is a culture of high expectation throughout the school and, as a result, teachers strive to improve. They receive good support and training. Teachers and subject leaders work well together and try to spread their best practice across all subjects. Despite low- and middle-ability learners achieving very well in English, their slightly inferior literacy skills and ability to produce high-quality extended writing cap their achievements across the curriculum. This is because too few teachers systematically and frequently take action to improve these key skills.
- You have invested heavily in improving pupils' attendance and pupils are beginning to attend more regularly. Attendance is now broadly average. Disadvantaged pupils are also attending more frequently than they were. However, there is still a difference between their attendance and the attendance of other pupils nationally.
- Pupils behave well when in and around the school buildings. Large numbers of pupils move carefully and efficiently between lessons. They are sensible and responsible. Pupils themselves say that behaviour is good and there are high levels of tolerance and respect. One pupil said to an inspector, 'You can be the person you want to be.'
- Pupils have good attitudes to their learning too. Pupils work well in lessons,

whether they are working on individual tasks or working in groups. Pupils listen well. Most complete their work with care and precision, demonstrating a pride in their work.

- Pupils' personal development is strong because pupils are encouraged to take part in a broad range of enrichment opportunities which run after school every day of the week. Participation in these sessions is high. Activities include sports, arts, music and educational visits. The school also has an extensive programme from Year 7 to develop pupils' leadership skills. The school's uptake of pupils doing the Duke of Edinburgh Award is very high. The school's achievement in developing pupils' personal skills through enrichment and leadership opportunities has recently been recognised with a gold award for learning outside the classroom. This provision and additional educational support have become so popular that the school now operates a 'Saturday School'. Older pupils volunteer to work with younger ones, helping them to improve.
- Parents who have responded to school questionnaires and to the opportunity to communicate with the inspection team were overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school. Most recognise the improving nature of the school and the strengths of the leadership team. A very high proportion – nine out of 10 – of those parents who responded to the questionnaire would recommend the school to other parents. In their inspection surveys, the staff and pupils were also complimentary about how well the school is performing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils continue to improve
- all staff take steps to improve the quality of pupils' writing and literacy skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors held meetings with you, your deputies, the assistant headteachers and the head of the sixth form. We also met with groups of pupils, students and six members of the governing body. We met with a group of teachers and middle leaders. We met with the school improvement partner. School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, information about

pupils' achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching. We also visited classrooms with your leaders to speak with pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I examined child protection information. We took account of the 147 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I took account of responses from 170 pupils and 73 staff to inspection surveys. I also considered the views of the 131 parents who texted me and the one who wrote a letter. I spoke to one parent on the phone.