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Mr David Dawes
Principal
The King's Academy
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Dear Mr Dawes

Short inspection of The King's Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2017 with Christine Durand, 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following that inspection, pupils' progress, achievements, behaviour and attitudes slipped. Since your appointment in September 2015, you have not shied away from taking decisive action, and at times difficult decisions, to improve matters. You have worked with governors to ensure recovery, to stabilise staffing and to live up to the school's aim. This is to 'provide a well-rounded education in which all children have the opportunity to realise their full potential as human beings, intellectually, socially, physically, spiritually and morally'.

Supported well by your re-energised leadership team, you have raised expectations of staff about what pupils can achieve in lessons. As a result, the school is on track to build on the improvements in pupils' achievements seen in school currently and in the 2016 Year 11 and sixth form examination results. You have effectively tackled most of the areas that required improvement at the last inspection. Mathematics was an issue then and it remains so due to the dip in 2015. Nevertheless, changes made are ensuring that more pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Presentation of pupils' mathematics work is of a suitable standard. You are taking action to ensure that presentation and handwriting is of a consistently good standard in pupils' work books across other subjects.

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remains a strength. Pupils' behaviour is good. They are courteous and friendly, and show consideration towards each other, adults and visitors. Pupils move around the

spacious site at break and lunchtimes in a mature fashion. As a result of the high expectations you have, and the work to ensure that staff carry out the school's behaviour policy consistently, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons are usually good. Actions taken to help pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour as part of the school's 'character' work to develop their readiness for their future lives, contribute successfully to the improvement in behaviour.

You, other leaders and governors are acutely aware of what is working well and what needs to improve, because of the very regular and robust systems developed to check the impact of the school's work. For example, you know that last year too many disadvantaged pupils, particularly those of lower ability, did not make good enough progress in mathematics and English. Improvements in the way teachers identify and then meet the learning needs of such pupils are diminishing the differences between their and other pupils' progress in lessons successfully. You are aware that there is still work to do to make sure all pupils make good progress from their starting points. To tackle this, you are working with teachers to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best.

Your resolute focus on improving the quality of teaching has raised the bar of expectations and is contributing to the improved progress pupils are making in lessons. Leaders conduct regular checks on the quality of teaching, pupils' work in books and pupils' assessment data and are consequently well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and progress. Teachers appreciate the feedback, challenge and support they receive from the senior team. Tenacious governance arrangements ensure that you and your team are held to account robustly for the collective impact of your work and, importantly, supported in your shared ambition to provide an outstanding quality of education and care.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records for pupils who are at risk are detailed and of high quality. Leaders are vigilant in supporting pupils and their families when facing significant challenge in their lives. They work in a timely way with other agencies to ensure that pupils at risk of harm are protected. Staff training is up to date and in line with recent Department for Education requirements. Staff have a good understanding of how to recognise and respond to concerns. This includes concerns such as female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation or risks from extremist or radical views.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of Year 11 pupils gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics dropped significantly in 2015. Your determined actions resulted in a 19% point improvement in 2016. The proportion of these pupils making expected progress from their broadly average starting points into school also increased from below that found nationally to just above. There was little variation in the progress of boys and girls. This represented significant improvement on the previous year. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, although

as you accept still too wide, narrowed by the equivalent of half a GCSE grade.

- Actions taken to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and improve the quality of teaching are starting to make their mark. The impact of this work is more evident in the increasing proportions of pupils currently on track to make more than expected progress. Assessment information shows this will be above average this year rather than broadly average in 2016. Current tracking information about pupils' progress across year groups and groups of pupils, as well as reviews of pupils' work books, show that this is not just as a result of a focus on Year 11. While much work has gone on to improve the presentation of pupils' written work, there are still occasions where teachers' expectations are not high enough.
- Work to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessment information about pupils' current progress is having a marked impact in the way teachers use this in lessons to plan learning. Work set usually helps pupils move on quickly from what they already know and understand, or deepens and broadens their skills and knowledge. Assessment information identifies pupils at risk of falling behind. Additional activities in class, or interventions provided during the school day help pupils to catch up and move them on to their next steps effectively. You know that some pupils are still not challenged to achieve their best in all lessons. Consequently, you are working with other leaders to rectify this.
- Pupils who access the deaf or hearing impaired or visually impaired provisions continue to achieve well. Appropriate adaptations are made where needed and pupils are included in all aspects of school life. Well-deployed adults ensure that pupils are stretched, challenged and supported to progress well in their learning. The relatively weaker progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities requiring additional school support, evident last year, triggered a robust response. Changes were made to the leadership of special educational needs. Alongside the strong pastoral support, you and the governors have ensured a stronger focus on academic achievement. Actions are effectively diminishing the difference between the progress these pupils make and others, and reducing their previously much higher than average persistent absence rates.
- Pupils develop the qualities that will stand them in good stead as they move towards adulthood. They develop a strong sense of right and wrong and empathy and care for others. They gain a good understanding of faiths and cultures other than their own and the qualities of respect and tolerance of others' views. Their charitable work to support others less fortunate than themselves is notable.
- The dip in pupils' performance at key stage 4 was replicated at the end of the sixth form in 2015. Changes, including new leadership, are having the desired effect. In 2016, Year 13 students made good progress from their starting points into the sixth form. Good-quality teaching, the businesslike atmosphere, strong pastoral support and the good range of courses enable students to thrive. Their personal, social, moral and cultural development continues to be well promoted. There are many opportunities for students to take leadership roles in the school and they become good role models for younger pupils. Such responsibilities contribute well to skills they need as adults. Virtually all move onto their chosen destinations successfully, including many to Russell Group universities.

- The inspection questionnaires indicate a minority of pupils and parents feel bullying is not dealt with well and the way the school manages behaviour is too strict. You have had to ensure a very clear and consistent approach to managing behaviour following the slide in behaviour prior to your appointment. Actions taken have resulted in well-behaved and friendly pupils and a very calm and purposeful learning atmosphere. The majority of pupils do not think bullying is a significant issue and any incidents are tackled by staff. This is confirmed in the detailed records you keep of any incidents. In response to the inspection questionnaires, you are determined to take forward the issues identified. For example, you and the governors have already planned a new parental survey in order to secure a broader consensus than the 8% of respondents to the parent questionnaire. You will then work with parents to tackle any concerns arising.
- Staff report positively on the differences made to pupils' attitudes and behaviour in recent times. Relationships between staff and pupils are cordial. Lessons are rarely disrupted by low-level misbehaviour. The proportion of staff who seek help to manage behaviour incidents in lessons has fallen significantly in the last year.
- Senior and middle leaders and staff also report positively on the changes to the culture and atmosphere in the school. They recognise the strong focus there is on ensuring pupils thrive academically as well as personally during their time in school. They talk of a step change in how all are held to account for their work through improvements made to the management of their performance. They welcome the added accountability in improving outcomes for all pupils and the opportunities they have to develop and improve their practice further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teachers use their knowledge of pupils' current skills and abilities consistently, to plan work that ensures that they make good progress from their varied starting points
- pupils' written work and presentation of their work is of a consistently good quality in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team undertook 'learning walks' with senior members of staff and yourself across a range of subjects and classes. Inspectors talked informally to

pupils in lessons and at breaktimes and formally to a group of pupils chosen by the inspectors at lunchtime. We heard a number of pupils read in the library and looked at pupils' work books while we were in classes. We held meetings with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of staff, representatives from the governing body and the Emmanuel Foundation. I also spoke to your school's school improvement partner. Results from the 92 respondents to Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, were taken into account alongside the written comments that some parents made. The outcomes of the staff questionnaire and pupil questionnaire were also considered. 190 staff responded to the staff questionnaire and 150 pupils to the pupil questionnaire. A range of documents were reviewed including the school's written evaluation of its work, documents related to the safe recruitment of staff and other safeguarding documentation. Information on the progress pupils are currently making in school was also reviewed.

During the inspection, the inspection team followed a number of lines of enquiry. These included:

- the extent to which teaching was ensuring that all pupils were supported to make good progress in their learning, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the extent to which pupils' personal development and welfare was well promoted
- the extent to which leaders and governors have tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and are driving the school forward.