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Mr Timothy Knapp
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Knapp

Short inspection of Whitecross Hereford

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2017 with Philip Hamilton, 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 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. You have developed an ethos of shared professional development, informed accountability and a sense of purpose and drive. You and your leaders are ambitious for every pupil. You train your staff, so they reflect on their teaching, reviewing what works and applying the best practice. You say in your ethos statement that, 'Grit and hard work are essential ingredients in success, but we also believe that school should be a place of happiness and fulfilment.' Inspectors saw evidence of this in the way you train your staff so that they observe each other and learn ways to teach more effectively. You help pupils experience links with other schools abroad, for example in Saverne. You have helped pupils' cultural learning by, for example, visiting the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Inspectors saw pupils taking part in sports coaching before school begins. This activity helps set the scene for the school day, and is part of the school's wide range of extra-curricular provision.

You have worked at further improving behaviour in the school. You introduced a stepped approach to behaviour management so that when pupils do not meet your high standards, you intervene quickly and teach pupils how to show politeness and courtesy. You encourage ambition and aspiration for your pupils. You help pupils to think about their next steps in education, holding assemblies on post-16 provision opportunities, teaching careers in a systematic manner, offering university visits to Year 8 pupils, including to Oxford university. You provide a formal interview day for

Year 11 pupils to prepare them for the world of work, and teach pupils how to write a curriculum vitae. All of this helps pupils to make the most of the opportunities ahead of them.

The governors are committed to the improvement of the school, and speak positively of the way in which you have improved communication to them. You provide the information they require in a timely and clear manner. This helps them make decisions about performance management strategy so that, for example, pupil outcomes can be linked accurately to teachers' professional development.

You were asked at the last inspection to address the following issues:

- Improve lessons for pupils so that work is suitably challenging. There is evidence you have been successful with this, for example improving outcomes for boys in mathematics. In English, however, inspectors saw evidence of undemanding work leading to a lack of engagement from some of the most able pupils.
- Accelerate the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Outcomes for these pupils in 2016 were in line with other pupils nationally with the same prior attainment. Your newly appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) is leading further improvement by, for example, reviewing the ways in which information is shared with teachers so they can plan their lessons effectively.
- Share best teaching practice across subject areas. Where this is most effective has been in the improvement of, for example, science GCSE grades. You have asked teachers to improve the resources they offer pupils by thoroughly checking they will lead to engagement and pupils' interest.

Safeguarding is effective.

Inspectors saw how you train your staff in how to keep pupils safe. Pupils speak highly of the lengths you go to in order to keep them safe; they know who to speak to if they have concerns for their welfare. You teach pupils how to stay safe online. We saw your planning for this, and spoke to pupils about what they had learned. Pupils know how to use the internet and electronic communications with safety. Your recruitment procedures are guided by statutory guidance, and we saw how you ensure that new staff are trained quickly after appointment in the school's safeguarding policies and culture. Governors are kept up to date with any referrals made to the local authority safeguarding agencies, and ensure that the school records its actions. Leaders commissioned an audit of their safeguarding culture in November 2016 because they want to keep vigilant and make sure all its actions are as secure as they can be. Governors are overseeing the implementation of this audit and have regular contact with the designated safeguarding officer and his team.

Inspection findings

- In 2015, pupils did not make the progress you expected for their ability in their GCSEs. However, in 2016 there was an improvement in almost every measure and in many subjects. For example, overall, pupils made the progress expected

of their ability. Disadvantaged pupils made progress in line with all other pupils nationally. Most able pupils made the progress expected of their ability as did pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- In 2016 pupils, especially boys, achieved well in GCSE mathematics, and they did better than would be expected nationally. You have revised schemes of work so that pupils are better at mathematical fluency. You have built pupils' confidence so that they are more skilled at problem solving. Your teachers observe each other and develop resources that engage pupils of all abilities.
- In a range of other subjects, in 2016, pupils' achievements were particularly good as they made better progress than would be expected of pupils nationally with the same ability. This was the case, for example, in science, in modern foreign languages, and in most humanities subjects. Teachers in these subjects worked closely together to moderate and standardise their tests and assessments. They develop teaching practice by observing one another and improving the ways they offer activities that are challenging and engaging. In books, lessons and in the school's tracking information inspectors could see that similarly strong progress is being made this year in these subjects.
- Key to this success is the quality of subject leadership. In mathematics, science and geography, for example, subject leaders are skilled at raising the expectations of pupils and holding teachers to account for securing the grades pupils should get, given their ability. The school is developing a system for sharing these leadership qualities across the full range of subjects and pastoral teams.
- In a few subjects, however, pupils made less progress than would be expected of their ability in 2016. These included subjects in the open element of the GCSE, for example pupils who took vocational subjects.
- You have reviewed the way vocational subjects are taught. You have changed the ways in which pupils are assessed in these subjects so that pupils get more accurate help and can make the improvements needed in their work. We saw information and books from pupils in these subjects that showed that those pupils taking vocational courses are making much better progress this year.
- Attainment in the English baccalaureate in 2016 was less than expected for middle- and high-ability pupils. This was because in history, for example, there was less improvement in the grades pupils gained. In response, you have improved teaching in this subject by helping colleagues work more closely with other successful subject areas such as geography. As a result, pupils this year in history are making better progress, and you believe they will achieve the grades expected of their ability.
- Pupils in English in 2016 made progress in line with national expectations, and this was an improvement on 2015. Progress, however, was less marked than in mathematics. You have made this a focus of your training this year, and inspectors saw signs of success in books and in lessons, especially where behaviour was managed securely and consistently and where activities were sufficiently challenging.
- Attendance has been rising overall over the past three years, and in 2016 was

above the national average. Currently, the attendance of pupils in all year groups is above the national average. However, for some vulnerable groups, improvement in attendance has been slower. A number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and some disadvantaged pupils are not attending regularly enough. We discussed the detailed measures you are taking to improve this, such as your close liaison with the local authority and support for families. You are having success with some individuals, but there are still too many vulnerable pupils who do not attend frequently enough. You and your governors have given this a high priority in your development plan for immediate attention.

- Effective teaching is increasingly widespread. You have paired staff to observe each other's teaching to help spread the best practice. You devote considerable time to sampling pupils' work and ensuring that assessments are accurate. Leaders have informed their planning using accurate tracking of progress from four data collection points across the year. You are making better use of appraisal and linking it to the teacher standards. You require teachers to place pupils' outcomes at the heart of their professional development.
- Inspectors saw lessons where work is tailored to the needs of specific pupils, for example in lessons where pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were taught. We saw positive relationships between staff and pupils, where pupils' behaviour was managed securely and consistently.
- You know that there is still teaching where your high standards are less consistently evident. We noticed examples where pupils took less pride in their books, and work was disorganised and unclear. Some pupils' work showed they were disengaged and uncertain as to the purpose of their learning, and there was evidence of ineffective match of activities to pupils' ability. This occurs on occasions in English. You are addressing these inconsistencies through your training programme, and monitoring the quality of teaching outcomes thoroughly with your governing body.
- Parents and staff are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One parent commented that; 'Our children have grown in confidence and ability since attending the school, and as parents, we have felt fully included in the school's ethos. The enthusiasm from the teachers is key to the school's success and has helped our children to thrive.' You have the confidence of your community. You are determined to help pupils fulfil their potential, and as you say in your ethos statement; 'We have high expectations of ourselves and our students and are determined that every student can and will achieve.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that the attendance of pupils supported by the pupil premium and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend more frequently and regularly

- accelerate actions to improve the quality of pupils' work in English and the rates of improvement in GCSE English, the open element and the English baccalaureate.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, 12 lessons were visited, and pupils' books were inspected in each lesson and in an additional book scrutiny. Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the leadership team, the SENCo, the designated safeguarding leader, the attendance officer and members of the governing body. We met with a group of pupils from the school council, and this included pupils from key stage 3 and key stage 4. We reviewed an extensive range of documentation, both produced by the school and published externally about the school. We scrutinized the Parent View responses, and there were 41 returns including 24 free text responses. We reviewed the staff questionnaire responses, and there were 36 returns. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.