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Dr Andrew Gillespie
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Dear Dr Gillespie

Short inspection of Burnham Grammar School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Julie Summerfield, 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have a clear vision for the school and lead with commitment and conviction. Your senior and middle leaders support you well, as do your governing body and your loyal, hard-working staff. You know your school very well and have concentrated on the right areas to bring about improvements. Since the last inspection, you have focused sharply on improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, outcomes for pupils have improved significantly over time and the school is popular and oversubscribed.

There is a welcoming, nurturing and caring atmosphere throughout the school. Parents support this view and one said 'I feel the school really looks after its students and treats them all as individuals'. The diversity of pupils is a real asset and is rightly celebrated. Pupils are respectful and supportive of each other and towards visitors. Relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong and have created a very positive atmosphere in which pupils want to learn. Pupils are confident and proud of their school and are keen and resilient learners. They greatly appreciate what staff do for them and therefore they behave very well, both in lessons and around the school. As a result, pupils make good, and sometimes better, progress.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified that pupils would make more rapid progress if: teachers made sure that the work more closely matched the needs and abilities of all pupils, especially the disadvantaged; pupils knew how to improve their work; and more pupils were helped to achieve high grades at GCSE and A level.

Leaders and governors have made considerable strides in tackling these issues and there have been clear improvements. More pupils are now achieving high grades in GCSE and A-level examinations and disadvantaged pupils are generally making the progress expected of them. One of the reasons for this is the comprehensive training programme that has helped staff to devise strategies to meet better the needs and abilities of individual pupils in lessons. Teachers are now much more adept at providing pupils with guidance about how to improve their work. However, you recognise that the quality of this guidance is still variable across subjects and does not consistently lead to pupils' rapid progress.

Leaders think strategically about the future and have seized opportunities to develop the school further. For example, they have begun a partnership with a local primary school to promote cross-phase work. The current teacher-training programme is developing local teachers' expertise and allowing the school to recruit high-quality staff. In addition, funding has been secured to begin a building project to provide better learning facilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school and there is an established culture of keeping pupils safe. This reflects the high priority you place on ensuring that all staff and governors are up to date with their training and that safeguarding records are fit for purpose and kept methodically and thoroughly. Senior leaders and governors work in close partnership, keeping a keen eye on ensuring that processes are rigorous. The strong pastoral care ensures that pupils' welfare is planned for effectively and this contributes strongly to their social and emotional well-being. The school utilises outside agencies for support very well and is quoted frequently as a beacon of good practice within the local area.

Pupils are taught to stay safe and they greatly appreciate the support that staff give them if they have a problem. They say that bullying is rare and that they know whom to go to should they experience any difficulties.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at the progress that pupils are making across subjects, especially those pupils who are disadvantaged and the most able. In general, the most able pupils are making expected progress from their starting points and in many cases exceeding the targets set for them. Attainment is high across subjects and boys are performing particularly well. Disadvantaged pupils are a high priority group within the school and all staff know who they are. Your new vertical tutoring system is beginning to have a positive effect on your

ability to monitor the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils more closely. You have robust systems in place to track the progress that pupils are making. If pupils are falling behind, interventions are put in place early on to help them catch up. There are particular strategies in place for disadvantaged pupils, but you recognise that more of them need to make rapid progress. For example, you are spending pupil premium funding sensibly on providing extra support for literacy and numeracy. Middle and senior leaders discuss pupils' progress regularly and are held to account for the progress that they make. However, the impact of interventions on pupils' progress is not analysed frequently enough to ensure that they are making rapid progress.

- Another aspect of the school's provision that I considered with you was the consistency of the quality of teaching within and between subjects. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. In class, the learning atmosphere is very positive and pupils are confident, self-motivated, keen to learn and not afraid to make mistakes. They exemplify the school's motto of 'embracing challenge'. We saw some excellent examples in history, geography and English of teachers' high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. We also saw examples of high-quality guidance to pupils on how to improve their work, enabling them to build their skills and deepen their knowledge and understanding. However, you recognise that there is more to do to ensure that all departments are equally consistent in the quality of guidance that they give and in tailoring the work to match the needs and abilities of all pupils.
- We also discussed the curriculum and considered how it was enabling pupils to maximise their potential. The curriculum is broad and balanced, with a wide variety of subjects on offer at key stages 4 and 5. Leaders and governors have a clear rationale for personalising the curriculum to enable pupils to follow option choices to match their aspirations, abilities and interests. This allows pupils to attain highly. The recently introduced changes to the key stage 4 programme are having an impact on raising pupils' aspirations and developing mature attitudes to learning. Targeted pupils receive help in making their option choices from a dedicated careers adviser. The personal and social aspect of the curriculum is particularly strong and helps pupils to stay safe, prepare for examinations and to become responsible citizens of the future. Pupils appreciate the range of extra-curricular opportunities to help them to develop their wider skills. You evaluate the curriculum on a regular basis and recognise the importance of doing so to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching so that all teachers share the highest expectations of what pupils can do and achieve and pupils make rapid progress
- a higher proportion than currently of pupils who are disadvantaged make more than expected progress so that they catch up with their peers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paula Sargent
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you, your leadership team, middle leaders and staff responsible for attendance. I also met five members of the governing body, including the chair, and your school improvement partner separately. We met with pupils in different year groups informally in lessons and also formally to discuss their learning and their views about school life. We visited learning across a range of subjects and year groups with members of the leadership team. Inspectors also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books. We looked at a range of school documentation, including current assessment information, the school's improvement plan, its self-evaluation, minutes of governors' meetings and attendance information for current pupils. There were no responses to the pupils' and staff questionnaires but inspectors considered 67 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 63 written comments by parents.