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Mr Rob Niedermaier-Reed
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Dear Mr Niedermaier-Reed

Short inspection of Hove Park School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 2017 with Sue Hunt and Harry Ingham, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 February 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 the sixth form continues to flourish. Following your appointment in September 2015, you have successfully built on the school's many strengths, with wise and practical support from your large leadership team and subject and pastoral leaders. You accurately identified aspects of the school's work that needed to improve before the disappointing GCSE results in 2016, and recognised the need to create new roles. For example, you appointed a pupil premium champion to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress and a literacy expert to raise standards in reading and writing. These appointments and other initiatives, including staffing changes, have been successful in generating rapid improvement, particularly in diminishing the difference between different groups of pupils' progress.

The school's vision statement, 'Embracing challenge' and 'Excelling in a changing world', is reflected in all its work. The high-quality pastoral care that the school provides strengthens pupils' confidence to embrace challenge, particularly for those pupils who are vulnerable or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's ambitious approach to promoting the personal development of pupils and students is to confront the challenging issues that they will meet in the changing world. In addition to topical news items, pupils and students explore and consider relevant issues such as mental health, sexual orientation and lifestyles, racism, British values, extremism, radicalisation and faiths and beliefs. The school's

excellent attention to pupils' and students' welfare, alongside good advice about education and careers, prepares them very well for their future lives.

In all year groups, the vast majority of pupils and students are cheerful, work hard and enjoy lessons and school life. Over 90% of parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their child is happy. Many parents praised the school in their written comments, for example, 'Staff go the extra mile', 'Teachers are passionate about what they do' and 'A fantastic school, staff are so understanding and supportive'. In addition to maintaining the good quality of teaching and learning seen during the previous inspection, staff model kindness and empathy alongside high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. All these contribute to the calm, positive atmosphere and culture at both the upper and lower sites. Governors and leaders are proud that the school has the most ethnically diverse population in the local authority and delighted that pupils work harmoniously together. Leaders are fully aware that bullying and poor behaviour do exist, but incidents are rare and tackled swiftly and firmly.

In key stage 4 and the sixth form, pupils and students have access to an increasingly wide choice of academic and work-related subjects. As a result, they are able to match their learning pathways better to their interests and abilities. Five modern foreign languages are on offer, alongside photography, food and catering, sociology and creative media, to name but a few options. Pupils and students appreciate the variety of trips, visits and after-school activities and those in Years 10 to 13 particularly value examination support and revision sessions. The school's determination to incorporate digital technology is seen in the fact that all pupils and students have tablets, which they use sensibly and effectively. Inspectors saw convincing evidence that the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. Pupils, and sixth-form students particularly, are now showing more confidence in working independently, helped by using tablets. Many said that they find teachers' feedback very helpful as it tells them how to do better.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and all leaders give a high profile to their safeguarding duties and do everything possible to ensure that pupils are both safe and happy. Records related to staff appointments, child protection cases or other safeguarding issues are kept up to date and secure. All staff attend training at the start of the academic year and, valuably, continue to have updated training throughout the year. This might, for example, be on dealing with sexting, self-harm or 'Prevent' issues (such as radicalisation). Information is cascaded effectively through four safeguarding teams, led by well-qualified designated safeguarding leads, who check that staff have accessed resources and absorbed the content. These leaders have excellent links with local authority child protection staff, the police and other support agencies, and meticulously follow up pupils who are absent.

Staff know when and how to refer any concerns to the safeguarding leaders. This includes concerns related to female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation or

risks from extremist or radical views. Assemblies, tutor times and notices and visual reminders around the school all contribute to making sure that pupils know what safeguarding is about and how to keep themselves safe. They are also clear that they should not shy away from sharing any worries they may have about their own or other pupils' situations.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we were delighted to see that sixth formers continue to make good progress and achieve the results they need to proceed to further to higher education, work or apprenticeships. Inspectors were keen to explore why the 2016 GCSE outcomes revealed weaknesses in some groups of pupils' progress, and to find out what you were doing to improve their learning. We also wanted to probe into why the school's absence figures rose last year. You were not at all surprised when I highlighted these aspects of the school's work and you were easily able to explain the factors involved and the steps that had been taken to improve them.
- In 2016, new GCSE headline measures were based on pupils taking eight EBacc subjects, including a modern foreign language, history or geography, and three other subjects. The measures also highlighted pupils' progress from their starting points, not the grades they attain. When you took up post, you realised that:
 - pupils, particularly those who were disadvantaged, took English, mathematics and science but only a few of the other EBacc subjects – this year close to 80% of pupils are taking all the subjects to meet the EBacc requirements
 - teachers did not push pupils enough to achieve the best that they could, but instead focused on pass grades – this year, teachers have the necessary understanding, tools and support that they need to concentrate on all pupils making the best progress that they can
 - a lack of stability or strong leadership in some subjects, and the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, were contributing to underperformance – these weaknesses have been resolved.
- All staff now have detailed information about pupils' starting points and projections for what they should achieve. They know to monitor particularly the progress of the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors saw many pupils being challenged by their work and making good progress as a result. We noticed that careful assessment of pupils' work is generating more accurate predictions about what pupils will achieve. The latter suggests that progress measures will improve in 2017 and be even stronger in 2018.
- At the same time, leaders value external support from schools to share best practice for disadvantaged pupils and to seek useful reviews from experts in areas that they wish to improve.
- In all years, analysis of pupils' outcomes reveals the strong link between poor attendance and weaker progress. Removing pupils who were persistent absentees last year or who entered the school after Year 7 confirms that this

raises the attendance figures by a large margin. Doing the same for Year 11 last year does the same and reveals better headline progress measures as well. The overall AS-level sixth-form value-added measures are also higher if the few persistent absentees are removed from the figures.

- The school is not alone in the local authority in struggling to persuade parents and pupils that attendance matters. Staff could not be more diligent about trying every strategy possible, such as employing a social worker and seeking all possible external support, to encourage and generate good attendance.
- One key stage 4 pupil commented that 'Teachers don't just see us as a result, they see the individual.' Pupils have a voice about school life and describe trust between them and staff. A parent observed that her Year 7 child was having 'a really positive experience'; this inspection confirmed that this is the case for the great majority of pupils and students.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is no let-up in the actions being taken to improve attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils, so that their achievement rises rapidly
- all teachers, pastoral and middle leaders continue to focus on the accurately identified groups and individual pupils whose progress does not yet match national expectations.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleagues and I met with you and, between us, we spoke to most of your senior leaders and a few of your subject and pastoral leaders. At all levels, these meetings included a few staff appointed by you during the last few terms. I met a representative from the local authority and five members of the governing body, including the chair. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils in the three key stages and spoke to other pupils around the school, during lessons and tutor time. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of classes across the school, accompanied by leaders. We scrutinised and evaluated documents, including your policies and safeguarding records, attendance and behaviour logs, and leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and development plan. Minutes from governors' meetings and leaders' evaluations of teaching and learning were also

examined. Account was taken of 143 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and over 70 additional written responses from parents. The low returns to Ofsted's pupil and staff questionnaires (46 pupils and 58 staff responded) were considered and I discussed them with you.