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Mr Phil Matthews
Principal
Hailsham Community College
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Dear Mr Matthews

Short inspection of Hailsham Community College

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 2017 with Anna Lawrence, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have shown an unwavering commitment and determination for your pupils to 'be the best they can be'. You have created a culture in which pupils can thrive, teachers know they are well supported, and leaders are able to drive further improvements. You have ensured that the school's collective, ambitious vision is shared by all. You know what will make your school even better and all leaders, including governors, are focused on making the necessary improvements.

Leaders use effective systems to support and improve areas of the school where pupils are performing less well. You and your senior leadership team check increasingly carefully to make sure systems have the impact on pupils' progress that you expect. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They challenge all leaders on what is working well and what still needs to improve. Staff appreciate the training they receive to improve their classroom practice. One teacher reported that her skills and knowledge have been 'furthered and encouraged by the culture of staff learning'. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and staff are committed to driving further improvement for their pupils.

Pupils appreciate the strong sense of community in your school. Staff know the pupils well as individuals and talk passionately about how they enjoy teaching

them. The positive atmosphere in lessons shows how closely teachers and pupils work together. Pupils report that behaviour is good and never disrupts their learning. Outside of classrooms, pupils are courteous and unfailingly polite. The school's culture enables them to grow as confident, eloquent and articulate young people, well supported by the staff, who provide extensive enrichment beyond formal lessons. The school's commitment to working as closely as possible with parents helps to create the ethos of care and support for all. Exchanges between staff and pupils throughout the day are a real hallmark, and illustrate the strength of relationships on which the school is built. Pupils speak highly of these excellent relationships, describing them as a key strength which contributes to their enjoyment of school. Pupils know that the staff strive continuously to improve learning. As a consequence, they respond well to the initiatives you have put in place to help them. For example, the clear expectation that pupils will review and improve their work, the careful monitoring of their use of mobile phones and the well-regarded mentor system. Pupils are rightly proud of their school.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. Notably, the system whereby pupils review their own work. This is integrated well into lessons. It is having a positive impact on pupils' progress, especially where it complements teachers' guidance to pupils on how to make their work better. For example, in a Year 11 geography lesson the quality of feedback to pupils was personalised exceptionally well and pupils with specific learning needs made particularly good progress. You have adapted the curriculum and styles of learning, particularly in the sixth form, to help pupils and students develop their reading, writing and communication skills and consequently make more rapid progress. There is a strong emphasis on teaching and learning, with a positive approach to staff training and support which are now focused on what is most needed to improve pupils' outcomes further.

You are rightly focused on improving outcomes for the most able, for the disadvantaged and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You understand that more consistent analysis of the impact of existing strategies is needed to support rapid improvement to such pupils' rates of progress and have established clear monitoring systems to do this. You have also introduced reliable systems that enable leaders to share and implement effective practices more widely across all departments. The autonomy you have given to the extended leadership team to do this is widening the range of interventions. You understand that closer analysis of the impact of these actions across all subjects of the curriculum is necessary.

You recognise that improving pupils' attendance must continue to be a focus for school leaders. Your team's relentless work has already led to some success, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and your leadership team also know that there is still further work to be done. Governors are keen to take a strategic approach to the challenge of raising levels of attendance, and, with you, they have rightly identified that further work with families and the community is needed to improve vulnerable pupils' attendance further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of a high quality. The school has a proactive and well-established safeguarding team in place. They ensure that safeguarding is high profile. Pupils, including the most vulnerable, confirm that they feel safe and are well informed about risks to their well-being. Incidents of bullying are very rare and, when reported, are acted upon swiftly and highly effectively.

Pupils speak confidently about how tolerant and accepting the school is of all. Older pupils speak proudly of the way in which no pupil should ever feel isolated because there is always someone, including pupils, who can help them. Leaders have a very good understanding of the wider issues that can affect pupils. As a result, they work closely with local primary schools and the wider community to minimise the impact of any such issues. While attendance remains a challenge for some groups of pupils, reducing patterns of absence among vulnerable groups are encouraging. Strong systems are in place to follow up absence on a daily basis, and these contribute to the school's overall rigorous and effective safeguarding practices.

Inspection findings

- I explored how well the most able pupils are achieving this year across a broad range of subjects. You rightly identify these pupils' progress as an area for improvement across the school. You have developed strategies to improve outcomes for these pupils, but the difference they are making to pupils' progress is currently mixed. Pupils report that they do not always feel that teachers give them work that stretches them or is challenging enough.
- In the sixth form, students' outcomes are strong because they make more rapid progress than in other years. You know the teaching strategies that are contributing to these better outcomes and are rightly applying them to the lower years. Other developments driven by your leader with responsibility for achievement and aspiration are beginning to have an impact on younger pupils' ambitions, including those of the most able.
- During my visit, I also explored your work with the most vulnerable pupils in the school. Leaders are totally committed to improving outcomes for these pupils, unanimously and categorically never allowing social or personal reasons to be an excuse for lower achievement. Your staff work relentlessly to help these pupils make rapid progress. They take a holistic approach to ensure that there is no discernible difference in the standard of work expected from this group. Work in pupils' books confirms this, and pupils speak highly of the support they receive.
- I also examined the organisation of your school curriculum. In particular, I considered how effectively your curriculum ensures that pupils achieve well across a broader range of qualifications than has been the case in the past. You have taken decisive action to improve this with an increasing number of

pupils now choosing to study French, in particular. A visit to a Year 7 lesson showed pupils clearly enjoying their learning, confidently and enthusiastically speaking French and being challenged to achieve more and to extend their answers. Older pupils confirmed that they have seen a real positive change in their experience of modern foreign languages.

- Given the challenges that some pupils face on entry to the school, you have implemented additional strategies to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, particularly throughout key stage 3. Leaders have begun detailed evaluation of the impact of these strategies, and this close scrutiny of their effectiveness will be essential to continued improvements.
- The sixth form is a clear strength of the school. Students achieve highly, enjoy being part of a thriving community and are increasingly accessing top universities. Sixth formers' support of younger pupils helps to inspire them to join the sixth form. As one pupil said to me, 'Why would I go anywhere else when the teachers know me and support me so well?' The sixth form is well organised, effective and improving. One member of staff stated that it is teachers' 'passion' for teaching their subjects to students who 'love their learning' that contributes to the success of your growing sixth form.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching consistently stretches and challenges the most able pupils in all subjects so they achieve the outstanding progress of which they are capable
- the strategies which are being used to improve attendance and progress for vulnerable groups are fully embedded, analysed systematically for impact and developed to secure continued improvements for these pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Patricia Goodhead
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the course of this inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and pupils. We also observed learning, with leaders, across year groups and in a range of subjects. School documents were examined, including your self-evaluation, improvement plans and current progress and attendance information. Inspectors checked school policies relating to

safeguarding and behaviour and explored how the school's additional funding is being spent. They took into account 82 responses to Parent View, 68 responses to the staff survey, 19 responses from pupils and students, and analysed their comments.