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Mr Peter Rattu
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Dear Mr Rattu

Short inspection of Sharnbrook Academy

Following my visit to the school on 30 March 2017 with Shân Christine Oswald, 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You, leaders and governors have worked hard to raise standards further since that inspection. Pupils' books demonstrate that the school's new marking and assessment policy is used consistently. Pupils told me that teachers help them know how well they are doing and how to improve. Most parents agree that their child is taught well. I received an exceptionally large number of responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. The majority of pupils agreed that in most lessons teachers make sure that everyone understands things, set work that is challenging and help them to do their best.

You have recently received a letter from the schools, students and teachers network (SSAT) 'celebrating your high attainment and progress'. It informed you that you had won two educational outcomes awards for 2016. This gives recognition that your school was in the 'top 20% of non-selective schools nationally for attainment and progress'. The curriculum is broad. Pupils told me that one of the best things about the school is the wide variety of subjects available and opportunities out of lessons, such as trips and productions. You are rightly proud of the quality of students' work in visual art.

As we toured the school together, we saw teaching that was characterised by confident subject knowledge which was communicated clearly. Once lessons have begun, learning time is used very productively. Pupils concentrate and work well together. Activities are varied and changes in activities are quick and well managed. Relationships between staff and pupils help learning. However, learning time is lost through lessons starting several minutes after their scheduled time. This is partly because the size and geography of the site makes movement between classes time-consuming, but also because pupils demonstrate little sense of urgency in getting to the next lesson.

Behaviour in the lessons we visited was exemplary. The vast majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that behaviour is good, although responses to the pupil questionnaire were more mixed.

Staff are very proud to work at the school and morale is high. Very nearly all staff to whom I spoke, or who completed the staff questionnaire, were supportive of senior leaders and agreed that the school has improved since the previous inspection. Leaders believe that the school is much better at monitoring and ensuring the progress of all pupils than at the time of the previous inspection. They are able to point to a range of initiatives, but find it more difficult to demonstrate that these are having a positive impact because the school's evaluation of how well it is doing in several areas lacks rigour.

Safeguarding is effective.

All documentation meets statutory requirements and this is regularly checked by senior leaders and governors. The 'key services' resource is new to the school. Leaders can show examples of this having a positive impact on pupils affected by mental health issues. Staff training on child protection is regular. Staff are familiar with the latest government guidance on child welfare and the anti-extremism 'Prevent' duty.

Pupils feel safe. The school is a happy place for learning. Pupils are known well and their well-being is taken very seriously. A parent commented that: 'The staff at school know my child as an individual.' Others told me about finding it excellent for children looked after, and others commented on positive support for children with medical needs.

Inspection findings

- Information before the inspection showed that, in 2016, students made less progress in the sixth form than pupils in the main school. This was particularly the case for girls. Overall, students in the sixth form made less progress than the national average. Leaders have responded to the issues identified. Systems are becoming more rigorous, but are not yet honed sufficiently so that monitoring information leads more quickly to changes in practice. Your school's monitoring information on current students shows that they are now making good progress. A range of additional support is in place, such as encouraging them to clarify their understanding through talking about their answers before writing.
- There is good-quality advice and guidance in the sixth form which leads to high retention rates. Inspectors observed high-quality feedback helping students make progress. Students attend regularly. The wider aspects of 16 to 19 study programmes beyond A-level courses, such as work experience, are developing but not rigorously enforced.
- You and your leaders recognise that while the progress of most pupils is very strong, this is not the case for some of the low-attaining disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have put in place a sensible range of strategies that are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pre-inspection information showed that overall attendance is above the national average. Within this, a small group of pupils have poor attendance. Most pupils enjoy coming to school. Nearly all pupils told me that they enjoy learning at least some of the time. Similarly, very nearly all parents agreed that their child is happy and safe at school. Nevertheless there is a small group of pupils who attend less regularly. The school has increased the resources available to tackle poor attendance. It has changed some of its practices so that some parents are phoned rather than a text being sent to check on absent pupils. The school takes robust action including legal action in some cases. However, leaders are not yet able to demonstrate the success of these actions through improved attendance rates.
- Finally, I wanted to discover why pupils in the main school make such strong progress over a wide range of subjects. In 2016, the progress of pupils from the beginning of Year 7 to the end of Year 11 was among the top fifth of schools nationally. However, leaders recognise that some pupils, especially the lower-ability disadvantaged, could have done better. The school's monitoring information on current pupils shows that pupils in this group are making better progress than at the same time last year. This is partly because the culture has changed so that teachers now focus on all pupils making progress rather than merely aiming for a grade C pass. Teachers told me that they are now held to account more clearly for the performance of their pupils. The performance of each pupil is regularly reviewed by leaders with teachers.
- Pupils told me that they do well because teachers give a lot of advice and support in lessons, but also out of lessons and after school. Pupils, especially those in Year 11, are highly appreciative of this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the impact of recent initiatives, such as activities to improve the attendance of the small group of persistent absentees, and new systems and processes in the sixth form, are evaluated so that leaders know what works best and can choose the most effective strategies
- learning time is maximised through more punctual starts to lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, teachers and other staff, members of the governing body, the chief executive of the multi-academy trust, a representative of the local authority and groups of pupils. I spoke by telephone to the chair of the governing body. Together with you and senior leaders, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, hear pupils read, look at pupils' books and see pupils at work. We observed pupils at breaktime. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. We also considered the 158 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire from parents, 551 from pupils and 100 from staff. I spoke to three parents by telephone.