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Dear Mr Dunn

Short inspection of The Sele School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 2017 with Her Majesty's Inspector Simon Webb, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have been in post for less than a year. The school slipped in effectiveness following the previous inspection but, as a new highly visible and approachable headteacher, you have ensured that the school is now improving quickly. The school is a happy place where most pupils enjoy their learning. Teaching is generally confident and engaging. Teachers welcome and value your emphasis on professional development and its positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. They gave examples of the 'trios' comprising teachers from different subjects supporting and challenging one another and sharing different skills, such as the promotion of literacy. Governors and senior leaders are ambitious for the school and its pupils. Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of what the school has needed to do to meet the needs of all its pupils.

The recent external review of governance has identified strengths and areas for development. This has given the new chair of the governing body a clear agenda to make governance even more effective. She has already found additional members whose expertise further enhances the governing body.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very positive. Most parents, staff and pupils are very positive about behaviour. A small group of pupils in each year group occasionally disrupt learning. This is dealt with robustly by leaders. As one parent

said, 'Some of the pupils are challenging but The Sele School goes above and beyond to look after each and every child.' In lessons and around the school we saw pupils working together diligently and getting on well together. Pupils told inspectors of their gratitude for the extra time and effort that staff give them. You offer a wide range of catch-up sessions for pupils, including on Saturdays and during holidays.

Careers education and preparation for the world of work are a strength of both the main school and the sixth form. They are well planned and evaluated. Pupils and parents value the wide range of opportunities offered by the school. For example, a parent, commenting on their daughter, told me that she has 'had many opportunities, for example the Duke of Edinburgh award, lots of trips, work experience and the young enterprise programme'. While the large majority of parents are very positive about all aspects of the school, including your leadership and communication, a small minority expressed dissatisfaction with new approaches to raised expectations around behaviour, communication and changes to the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. There are strong procedures in place to ensure safe recruitment practices. All documentation meets statutory requirements and this is regularly checked by senior leaders, governors and the local authority.

Pupils feel safe and enjoy school because of the high levels of pastoral care provided by the school staff. Staff receive training in child protection, which ensures that they all know the signs of child abuse and what to do if they are concerned. In the pupil questionnaire, a small number of pupils said that there was not an adult to whom they could go. We explored this with staff and pupils and could find no evidence to support these concerns. In fact, as one parent said, 'The fact that it is a small school means that all the teachers know every child.' The school's record-keeping of child protection incidents is extremely comprehensive and ensures that pupils are safe.

Inspection findings

- Given the dip in pupils' progress since the previous inspection, followed by improvements last year, I wanted to check whether the improved progress is being sustained. In 2016, the progress of pupils from the beginning of Year 7 to the end of Year 11 was broadly average overall. You recognise that, within that average, some pupils, especially the most able, could have done better. The school's monitoring information on current pupils shows that they 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. This has led to a greater focus on ensuring that higher-

attaining pupils make the progress of which they are capable. As one parent commented:

'My son enjoys attending school, ... as a more able pupil he has always been challenged and the feedback we have received has been excellent. He has starting working towards his bronze Duke of Edinburgh certificate and on Thursday will be visiting Cambridge University to take part in a maths competition.'

- I was concerned that last year the school's average attendance was below that for other schools nationally. Leaders have rightly identified persistent absence as an ongoing priority and a recent review has identified appropriate strategies to improve it. The school is now working more closely with educational welfare officers and issuing fixed-penalty notices to families. These are starting to have a positive effect on the wider school population.
- Your target for attendance is aspirational and you have a clear strategy in place to move the school towards this aspirational target. The early intervention with pupils who slip below 96% is raising awareness of the importance of attendance across the school. Your decision to introduce attendance support plans for pupils who are frequently absent is improving attendance for those pupils, especially when parents are involved in the meeting.
- I was also concerned that the number of exclusions was well above that in other schools. Fixed-term exclusions were historically high. This is largely because, as the school has space, you have to accept mid-year entry for pupils. They often need support or sanctions before they can meet the higher expectations of behaviour at the school. You have raised the standards for acceptable behaviour this year, with an expectation that there is a parent meeting for each child whose behaviour is causing a concern in lessons. As a result, referrals to isolation and exclusions were high at the start of the year. These are both now reducing quickly as the pupils understand the new requirements. There have been no permanent exclusions this year
- In 2016, students' progress in the sixth form was not as good as in other schools. I wanted to check whether students' progress in the sixth form is getting better. You had already recognised that the sixth form was in need of improvement. New leadership of the sixth form has recently been put in place. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and have acted quickly to address several weakness. For example, timetables have been reviewed to ensure that all students now get the correct guided learning hours. Teachers in the sixth form plan learning with a good knowledge of students' starting points and use their subject knowledge to challenge all the students to exceed their target grades. Students' books show that the majority of them are exceeding their targets this year.
- Careers advice and guidance in the sixth form are highly effective, with all current pupils securing offers at university again this year and all students who applied to university last year taking up places at their first- or second-choice university.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Students' progress in the sixth form improves further by:
 - making sure that entrance requirements for courses are appropriate for the ability required to be successful
 - reviewing the sixth-form curriculum, especially in the light of new technical and vocational courses becoming available, to ensure that the courses on offer meet the needs and abilities of the pupils likely to choose the sixth form
- Attendance is improved further by building on the strategies recently introduced to reduce persistent absence.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. 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, the chair of the governing body and groups of pupils. 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 lunch and 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 50 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire from parents, 31 responses from pupils and 41 responses from staff.