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Mr Hywel Jones  
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Dear Mr Jones

### **Short inspection of West London Free School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2017 with Kanwaljit Singh, 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 July 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You joined the school in September 2014 and have successfully addressed the areas identified for improvement. You and your team of dedicated staff have sustained a culture of high ambition, building upon pupils' engagement and enjoyment of the enrichment opportunities offered. Leaders are rightly proud of the breadth that the curriculum offers.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance that informs their plans for further development. Last year's GCSE results, the first cohort to complete key stage 4, demonstrated the school's particular strengths in subjects such as music, science and the humanities. Subjects such as physical education, classical civilisation and modern foreign languages were less successful. Effective training and support are ensuring that standards are rising in these subjects so that they match the best in the school. Leaders use the school's resources well and collaborate with other schools to support continued improvements.

Pupils typically join the school with higher-than-average prior attainment. Pupils' GCSE attainment last year was correspondingly strong overall, while progress was in line with the national average. The most able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, made significantly better progress in science than their peers nationally. This was because of the effective stretch and challenge that teachers provide pupils as a matter of routine. This reflects staff's high expectations for pupils' performance and pupils' own generally high aspirations, resulting in positive attitudes to learning. Lower- and middle-prior-attaining pupils made broadly average progress across subjects last

year at GCSE. The progress being made by lower- and middle-prior-attaining pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, was agreed as one of the three prioritised areas for the inspection.

Leaders recognised that there has been a declining trend in pupils' attendance since 2014. Staff have been successful in halting the trend through effective recruitment and development of systems to support good attendance. New leadership of this area is driving the necessary improvements. Leaders and inspectors agreed to prioritise this area of the school's work during the inspection.

The sixth form opened as planned in September 2016. The first cohort are doing well on suitably challenging courses that largely suit students' prior attainment. Subject-specialist teachers draw upon the skills and learning that they nurture in their subjects at key stages 3 and 4. Students study in the new Franklin House building, a short walk from the main site, most of the time and benefit from good support and guidance that supports their personal development. During the inspection, leaders and inspectors agreed to explore the extent to which students were making good progress, following their transition onto their 16 to 19 study programmes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school underpins pupils' personal development and promotes their well-being in part through the 'great conversations' that take place within the planned curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to discuss issues including radicalisation, drug abuse and e-safety. Pupils reported to inspectors that they explore these important themes and others with confidence. This aspect of the school's work bolsters pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain. Pupils' awareness and understanding of risks, both local and further afield, is strong because of the time and thought that staff dedicate to key issues relating to pupils' decision-making, lifestyles and management of risks.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the effective work to support pupils' well-being throughout the curriculum builds upon robust and effective safeguarding policies and procedures. Regular safeguarding audits conducted by governors confirm that the systems to promote pupils' welfare are rigorous. Pre-employment checks, referrals to external agencies and records of the work done to support pupils through their education are recorded accurately and robustly. Staff receive regular and effective training so that they remain up to date with the latest statutory guidance and can perform their roles effectively in keeping children safe. Parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, agreed that pupils are safe at this school. Many commented upon the positive and effective support provided to pupils.

### **Inspection findings**

- Between 2014 and 2016, pupils' overall attendance declined and persistent absence rose. This was because school routines were less effective at addressing the challenging and complex issues facing some pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was particularly weak.

- Since September 2016, new staff and robust systems of intervention, support and follow-up have been very effective in halting the downward trend and have started to reverse it. This follows leaders' accurate analysis of the reasons behind the former trend that has helped shape effective strategies to target the correct approaches. Staff are precise in their work, recognising the essential links between pupils' attitudes to school, their personal circumstances and then removing barriers to attendance.
- Attendance overall and for groups of pupils is now approaching last year's national average for secondary schools. Cases of persistent absenteeism have reduced markedly. Leaders recognise that some work still remains to ensure that attendance across year groups remains consistently good while the current strategies are firmly established.
- The new and growing sixth-form's curriculum successfully extends students' learning beyond their GCSE studies by offering a wide range of A levels. Most of Year 11 chose to stay on and study here, and some told inspectors that this was because they knew how well teachers support their learning and the ambition that the school breeds. The few who chose not to stay on at this sixth form successfully moved onto alternative education and training routes.
- Most students started Year 12 studying four A-level subjects. However, the majority have now elected to continue with three in order to focus upon the courses that best suit their career aspirations.
- Teachers' skilled questioning, planning to meet students' needs and high expectations are typical characteristics of A-level lessons. However, students' progress in some subjects is more rapid than in others. The strong progress in science at GCSE is not yet reflected in similarly quick progress in chemistry and physics A levels, for example.
- Teachers are good at identifying students' strengths and weaknesses through effective assessment. The information gained then informs effective support and interventions that are helping students make good progress overall.
- Leaders have been meticulous in their evaluation of the sixth-form's performance during its first year and have identified what works and what requires further development. Leaders are correct in their view that a combination of more precise advice and guidance alongside further developing the pastoral curriculum will help students to embed the skills and attributes required to be highly successful. Currently, students receive a wide range of personal development opportunities including trips and visits to universities, and talks from outside speakers about careers and preparing for life after school. However, some strategies and activities are new and not embedded routines. Leaders continue to explore new ways of supporting students' personal development.
- Pupils made good progress at GCSE last year. This is a result of good teaching, learning and assessment across departments, alongside effective interventions and support. Additional support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is particularly effective in helping them do as well as their peers from the same starting points.
- Lower- and middle-prior-attaining pupils are now making progress approaching the stronger performance of the most able pupils last year. Pupils make quick gains in their learning when they join the school, building upon the knowledge and skills

developed at primary school. Teachers accurately identify disadvantaged pupils and their prior attainment to aid their planning.

- Pupils eligible for additional funding make up any differences in their learning compared to that of their peers from similar starting points. This occurs because of effective strategies used by leaders using the pupil premium and catch-up premium.
- Pupils who join the school with lower-than-expected attainment in literacy and numeracy receive very effective and closely monitored support. Consequently, their progress across the curriculum quickly catches up with their peers and pupils apply those key skills with confidence in their work.
- Subjects such as the humanities, science and English provide pupils with regular opportunities to enrich their literacy and numeracy skills by applying key ideas regularly to well-chosen activities.
- Pupils' work demonstrates consistently good progress and in some cases very rapid progress because teachers typically know how to get the best out of pupils. Pupils' behaviour and strong attitudes to their learning underpin teachers' work to help pupils make effective use of their time in school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance continues to improve across the school, reducing any remaining variability between year groups
- sixth-form students make consistently good or better progress across subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors:

- visited 23 lessons, many jointly with members of the school's leadership team, at both the Palingswick House and Franklin House sites, where they scrutinised pupils' work and discussed their learning
- visited both of the school's libraries to observe how these spaces are used by pupils
- scrutinised school documentation, including attendance and assessment information;

behaviour information; safeguarding records, including the single central record of pre-employment checks; policies and procedures; leaders' evaluations of the school's performance; and plans for development

- held meetings with leaders, staff, pupils and those responsible for governance
- considered the views of 132 parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View
- scrutinised the school's website, which is compliant with the Department for Education's guidance.
- No staff or pupils responded to Ofsted's surveys.