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19 June 2017

Mr Peter Bourton
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Dear Mr Bourton

Short inspection of Idsall School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2017 with Mark Feldman, Ofsted Inspector and Gwen Onyon, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Despite staffing challenges in a number of key subject areas, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is orderly, calm and well managed. Pupils are complimentary about the school. They value the support that they receive from teachers, which they feel helps them to learn. Weekly personal, social and health education (PHSE) lessons, supplemented by assemblies, successfully contribute to several aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Leaders have ensured that the programme prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel supported and enjoy their work. Almost all of the staff who completed the staff questionnaire agreed that the school has improved since the last inspection and that they are proud to be a member of staff at Idsall School.

Leaders, including governors, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are well informed about pupils' experiences in the school. Governors hold school leaders to account for the performance of the school and gather information through governor visits and external audits to ensure that they have an objective view.

You have taken an open and self-critical look at results for pupils. Although examination results were broadly in line with what would be expected of most

pupils with similar starting points, you recognised that this is not as strong as it could be and accept that there are still a number of improvements to be made at the school. For example, you know that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils need to improve and that high-ability boys did not do as well as they should. Leaders have put in place detailed plans to address weaknesses, and these are helping to secure improvement. You are taking robust action to improve this and are challenging teachers to help their pupils do better, with a focus on quality-first teaching. As a result, a culture of ambition is being further developed within the school community. You, senior leaders and other leaders at the school have a shared vision and have convincingly demonstrated determination and capacity to improve the school.

Leaders at all levels now share a better understanding of the main barriers to disadvantaged pupils' progress. The school has sought external support in this area, and the changes made to ensure that the extra funding for these pupils is spent wisely is now better addressing these barriers. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' progress across all year groups is improving.

Not all pupils respond well. Exclusions were high for vulnerable groups in 2016 but have reduced this year. However, too many pupils are absent for too long, especially in pupil groups likely to be vulnerable, such as disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You are addressing this, and there are signs that attendance for these groups is improving.

Inspectors in their last report noted that the school should make improvements in some aspects of teaching and learning. The changes you have made to affect the quality of teaching, assessment systems, progress tracking and analysis of assessment information are now having a positive impact on pupils' progress across all year groups and most subjects. Teaching is good and improving. Teachers use their subject expertise and detailed knowledge of what pupils already understand, know and can do to plan lessons. All teachers are now well informed about individual pupils' starting points and most are using this to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' ability. However, sometimes teachers do not always match the learning activities to the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils. You have introduced a teaching and learning development group to lead further improvements in teaching quality. They lead regular briefings, the sharing of good practice and coaching programmes. Continuing professional development is tailored to suit individual teachers' needs. Weaker practice has been addressed through performance management procedures.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school through the effective systems that are in place. Leaders, including governors, take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Detailed records are maintained. The school works closely with a range of other agencies when necessary and referral processes are robust and secure. All staff receive training across a range of areas, including the 'Prevent' duty. Staff

receive regular updates about safeguarding. Pastoral leaders and other staff work closely together to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe from a variety of risks. Tutorial sessions, personal, social and health education lessons and assemblies are used for this purpose. Pupils feel safe in school. The majority of pupils agree that if bullying happens, it is reported and dealt with robustly. However, parental feedback shows that a few parents are concerned about how effectively leaders tackle bullying.

Inspection findings

- You are aware that GCSE results in 2016 show that boys with high prior attainment do not make as much progress as pupils from other starting points. The progress of these pupils has been made a priority in school development plans. Leaders have introduced more aspirational targets to ensure that all pupils aim for the highest levels of achievement. Teachers are expected to provide additional challenge for all pupils.
- Information provided by the school shows that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress. You and your colleagues have worked with external consultants, and the revised pupil premium strategy is having impact. However, you rightly recognise that this progress needs to be more rapid and the strategies need to be embedded across the school.
- You have ensured that the assessments your teachers set are of a high quality. You check assessments with rigour to ensure that there is reliability of information given to pupils and parents about their progress.
- Relationships are strong. Teachers know their pupils and, in turn, pupils trust their teachers. Teachers usually have high expectations. However, sometimes teachers are too accepting of pupils completing too little work, or work of a poor quality.
- Not all middle leaders have as strong abilities to track, measure and so improve the outcomes of pupils as you would like and you know this is an area for development. Support and training is in place to help middle leaders gain these skills.
- Outcomes at the end of the sixth form in 2016 were in line with national averages. Almost all students who left in 2016 went on to a variety of suitable destinations. Leaders are ambitious to see the sixth form continue to improve. Teaching has improved as a result of careful monitoring and personalised professional development for teachers. However, not all teachers are as effective in providing intervention strategies to support students who are falling behind with their learning. Where this is effective, students make better progress.
- Leaders make sure that all sixth-form students have access to a wide range of non-qualification activities so that when sixth formers leave the school they are well prepared and confident to take their next steps in education or employment.
- Teaching assistants provide good support to teachers and their contribution is valued by pupils and parents. One parent summarised the views of many and

said, 'I have nothing but extremely high regard for learning support. The support and communication has always been second to none. The team of teaching assistants deserve much praise.'

- The student support base provides valuable intervention for groups of pupils and is used for academic support as well as developing self-esteem.
- Attendance was better than the national average overall in 2016. Information on pupils' attendance during the inspection shows that attendance is still better than the national average. However, for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, attendance is too low, although it is improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching, including in the sixth form, is as effective as the best in the school so that the progress and achievement of disadvantaged pupils and higher-ability boys in all year groups improves
- the pace of progress for disadvantaged pupils is increased by ensuring that new strategies for the use of pupil premium are more quickly embedded across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Gill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you and senior leaders. I spoke with one governor. We scrutinised a range of documents, including safeguarding policies and the school's analysis of pupils' achievement. Inspectors visited, with school leaders, 22 parts of lessons across Years 7 to 10 to observe teaching and learning across a range of subjects and to look at pupils' work. A Year 7 assembly and two tutor groups were also observed. We met with pupils formally as well as holding informal discussions with them. We considered the 164 responses to Parent View and the 63 staff responses to Ofsted's survey. Sixty-nine responses to the pupil questionnaire were also considered.