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Mrs Julie Swales
Principal
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Dear Mrs Swales

Short inspection of Guilsborough Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Kathryn Hardy, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Attainment in public examinations has remained above the national average. This reflects the good progress that most groups of pupils make in their time at the school. You and the other staff have also continued to ensure that students make good progress in the sixth form. Achievement in almost all of the subjects offered in the sixth form is consistently in line with the national average. All students who left the sixth form last year progressed to higher education, training or employment, with a high proportion securing their university destination of choice.

This good performance has been sustained as a result of:

- the positive learning environment in which lessons take place
- the continued good quality of teaching
- the rich and engaging curriculum which enthuses pupils and is complemented by good provision for enrichment
- careful tailoring of the curriculum to meet individual pupils' needs, particularly in key stage 4
- pupils' above average attendance, their keenness to learn and their mostly good behaviour

- the careful tracking of pupils' progress by senior and middle leaders which means that they can intervene when individual pupils fall behind
- the strong levels of care provided for pupils experiencing personal, social or emotional difficulties.

In the time since your appointment as principal in September 2016, you have built on the successes of your predecessor and reinvigorated strategies to ensure that all pupils receive an equally good quality of education. You know, for example, that while the large majority of pupils achieve consistently well in their time at the school, this is not the case for everybody. You are passionate about remedying this. Your determination that all pupils should benefit equally from the school's many strengths is reflected in the priority you are giving to raising the achievement of groups of pupils who previously have achieved less well than others.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You know that not all of the actions taken have been successful enough. While some important successes have been secured for disadvantaged pupils, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not been consistently strong. You are taking firm and decisive action to tackle this, including by paying close personal attention to the quality of the teaching and support these pupils receive.

Staff value your leadership highly. They are particularly appreciative of the careful, systematic way in which you are bringing about change. Your approach ensures that the strategies you are introducing do not create unnecessary work for teachers but make it easier for them to do their jobs well. For example, you are currently working with staff to refine the school's assessment policy in response to the current government's initiative to reduce teachers' workloads. You and other senior leaders ensure that any changes introduced are underpinned by careful analysis of educational research. For example, staff have worked with a research charity which promotes the academic achievement of disadvantaged pupils in order to improve aspects of teaching and learning.

The other members of the senior leadership team value greatly the increased responsibility and autonomy you have given them since becoming principal. They have risen to the challenge and, as a result, are playing a more influential role in improving the school than before. Plans are in place to extend this approach to the middle leadership team. Some middle leaders are already benefiting from secondments to the senior team. At the same time, you are ensuring that staff are held fully to account. Careful analysis means that you know which departments are performing well and which need to improve. Strong line management arrangements mean that support from senior staff is tailored carefully to the needs of individual subject leaders.

The governing body carries out its roles effectively. The chair of the governing body visits the school frequently and, together with the other governors, has a good understanding of its strengths and priorities for further improvement. Governors

report that the improved quality of information they receive from you and your colleagues has further strengthened their knowledge and understanding of the school's performance. Minutes from meetings of the governing body confirm this.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe and are safe at school. The leaders responsible for keeping pupils safe carry out their roles very effectively, ensuring that they and the rest of the staff are kept up to date with the latest statutory requirements. Very well-planned training means that staff are alert to any signs that pupils are at risk of harm. A rolling programme, accompanied by weekly briefings, means that staff are well informed about the changing risks that pupils face and know what steps to take if they have any concerns. The staff work very closely with external agencies, for example social care and the police, to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are kept safe and protected. The designated safeguarding lead and her deputies refer any serious concerns quickly to social services. They are tenacious in following up these concerns where they judge that action is not being taken quickly or effectively enough.

The staff also ensure that pupils know about potential risks to their well-being. Pupils regularly receive assemblies and additional teaching in tutor time about issues such as child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, extremism and mental health. You regularly bring in experts to talk to pupils about how to manage particular risks. You also ensure that parents are kept well informed about risks to their children's well-being, for example by running seminars on peer-to-peer abuse and sexting.

You have strengthened the school's capacity to support vulnerable pupils by increasing the amount of pastoral staff available to support pupils in each year group. This has increased the quality and availability of support for pupils who are vulnerable to harm or are experiencing social or emotional difficulties. A good programme of training for these staff is also deepening further the specialist expertise in child protection throughout the school.

The pupils who met the inspectors told us that when bullying is reported, it is dealt with effectively. You monitor students' views very carefully to ensure that they continue to feel safe. A good example of this is a survey taken earlier this year which highlighted that pupils did not always feel safe on the buses to and from school. In response, the leader responsible implemented a range of measures, involving the local council, the bus companies concerned and the pupils themselves, to tackle these concerns. At the time of the inspection, a further survey was about to be undertaken to check that these measures had proved to be effective.

The survey of pupils completed during the inspection showed that some pupils do not think the school's provision for careers information, advice and guidance is strong enough. Inspectors looked at this aspect of provision carefully. They found that the school's careers programme is not planned carefully enough to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils, including younger pupils. The school's capacity to provide guidance tailored to pupils' individual needs and aspirations is too limited for

such a large school. This explains why some pupils feel ill-informed about the full range of opportunities for higher education, training and employment they could aspire to, and how these link to their curriculum choices and levels of attainment.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, not all lower-attaining pupils leaving Year 11 made the same good progress as the middle- and higher-attaining pupils, including in English and mathematics. Concerted action is being taken to ensure that this group of pupils in other years achieve as well as their peers. In particular, leaders have an increased focus on this group of pupils. Setting arrangements have been refined to ensure greater equality of opportunity for lower-attaining pupils, for example by ensuring that they do not always have to learn in 'bottom sets'. The school's assessment information indicates that lower-attaining pupils currently in the school are achieving better than before, including in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is increasingly meeting the needs of lower-attaining pupils but there remains room for improvement. In the lessons visited, these pupils were sometimes given work which was too easy. Teachers do not pay sufficient attention to ensuring that these and other pupils present their work neatly and accurately.
- The school's work to support disadvantaged pupils, particularly middle- and higher-attaining disadvantaged pupils, is proving to be increasingly effective. These pupils in Year 11 made good progress last year in English and mathematics, and in the subjects which contribute to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). As a result, a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieved the EBacc qualification than did other pupils nationally last year.
- The school's provision for disadvantaged pupils benefits from the excellent leadership. No stone is left unturned by the senior leader responsible for supporting these pupils. This includes evaluating closely and regularly how well they are achieving and ensuring that the money allocated to support them is spent wisely and effectively. School leaders are rightly focusing their attention on improving achievement for lower-attaining disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils achieve particularly well in science. Science lessons are characterised by high levels of enthusiasm, strong relationships between pupils and their teachers and teachers' high expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve. Strong leadership in science has helped strengthen the quality of teaching to the benefit of all pupils. Hence, last year, achievement in core and additional science at the end of Year 11 rose to be in line with the strong achievement seen consistently for pupils studying three separate sciences.
- The sixth form continues to be good. The large majority of sixth-form students achieve well on their programmes of study. Sixth-form students benefit from excellent opportunities to promote their personal development and play a significant role in the wider life of the school. School leaders are committed to making the sixth form accessible for a wider range of students and have adapted entry requirements and the curriculum so that the sixth form is more inclusive. Last year, the small but growing proportion of lower-attaining sixth-form students

achieved less well than expected. Leaders have implemented and refined a range of strategies to ensure that this represents a blip rather than a trend.

- Leaders know that actions taken to improve provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not been effective enough. You are determined to remedy this and have taken personal oversight of this aspect of the school's work. For example, you have met with parents who have previously expressed concerns about the quality of provision, commissioned experts to evaluate this aspect of the school's work and personally attended training in the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You are monitoring very closely the effectiveness of the school's action plan with regard to these pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they carefully tailor the school's provision for careers information, advice and guidance to meet the needs of all pupils, including those in the lower years
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what lower-attaining pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can achieve
- teachers insist on better presentation of pupils' work
- they monitor closely the actions taken this year to improve the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make sure that these pupils achieve as well as they should.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors met with you, other leaders and governors. We spoke with pupils in groups and informally around the school. We visited lessons to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and pupils' well-being, and their attendance, behaviour and achievement. Inspectors also considered information on the school's website. We took account of the 129 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the 36 responses to a staff survey and the 173 responses to the online survey for pupils. We also considered correspondence received from parents.