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Mr Rod Welsh
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rod Welsh

Short inspection of St Edward's Royal Free Ecumenical Middle School, Windsor

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Paul James, 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 June 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 continue to lead a school that is very popular in the local community and has recently expanded to admit more pupils. Pupils and staff are welcoming, polite and proud of their school.

You have developed the senior leadership team to strengthen the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You appointed an energetic head of the English department at the start of this year and an experienced specialist leader of mathematics to join the school in September. You have sensitively managed some challenging staffing issues during a period of turbulence. Teachers and support staff are highly committed and dedicated to pupils' welfare and academic achievements. Parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, appreciate that their children are 'thriving'. One parent commented, 'I feel my child has been taught well not just academically but to be a kind, thoughtful and tolerant human being.' Many parents recognise the strength of the school's leadership and the effectiveness of teachers.

You have skilfully organised the new curriculum to progressively develop pupils' skills in a wide range of subjects, and to build confidence. The majority of pupils are happy to come to school. Pupils told us that they enjoy their lessons and additional activities that you provide for them including performing arts; visits from experts in industry; and science, technology, engineering and mathematics challenges. In

addition, pupils are proud to accept responsibilities that develop their leadership skills, such as acting as prefects, house captains, librarians and digital leaders.

You have taken effective action to consider the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Leaders routinely monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by observing lessons and reviewing pupils' work. You have used the knowledge gathered to construct a programme of professional development that meets the needs of individual members of staff. Teachers now challenge the most able pupils more frequently in lessons but some pupils and their parents rightly feel teachers could set work that is even more difficult. Governors, led by a new chair, are effectively holding leaders to account. The governors have adopted an innovative process to increase their knowledge about specific aspects of the school and consequently have a wealth of information on which to base their questioning. Governors' detailed and well-kept records confirm that they challenge leaders on performance data, but this has not always happened in a timely manner.

Senior leaders have accurately prioritised where improvements are needed and are taking rapid action towards reducing the difference in achievement between the small percentage of pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils. In the 2016 national tests for Year 6 pupils, the girls in the school achieved higher than boys in writing and mathematics, and the percentage of pupils achieving the 'greater depth standard' was lower than in some other similar schools. Some pupils did not achieve as well in mathematics as they did in other subjects. Some pupils who are in Year 8 and took part in activities to catch up when they were in Year 7 have not made the accelerated progress intended. Teachers do not consistently focus with rigour on promoting progress for all pupil groups, or ensure that all pupils are working as hard as they can.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. You have reliable systems in place to check for the recruitment of suitable staff and visitors. Staff and governors frequently attend relevant training on safeguarding and keep up to date through helpful weekly briefings. Consequently, staff and parents are confident that pupils are safe in school.

Pupils feel safe because of your stringent entry procedures. Pupils told us staff are always visible at break and lunchtimes and that they feel comfortable talking to staff about issues that concern them. Poor behaviour is rare and staff respond quickly and efficiently should it occur. Your documents confirm that senior leaders have taken rapid action when an individual pupil's behaviour does not meet your expectations and contravenes the school's values. A small minority of parents raised concerns about bullying. Pupils who spoke to us do not share the same concern. Teachers prepare pupils to stay safe from harm through a wide-ranging programme of personal development that includes topics such as cyber bullying, substance misuse, and racist and homophobic abuse.

Senior leaders work closely with the local authority and have successfully implemented strategies to improve pupils' attendance further. The attendance of pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has exceeded the national average for secondary schools during this year.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, as well as focusing on the quality of safeguarding and actions taken since the previous inspection, inspectors pursued several lines of enquiry. These were: the school's ethos and pupils' behaviour; the progress of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in writing and mathematics; the progress of the most able pupils; and boys' achievement.
- Pupils' behaviour continues to be good because you maintain an ethos of mutual respect between staff, parents and pupils underpinned by the school's Christian values.
- Pupils work and socialise well together, support one another and are kind. Pupils move around the school maturely without the need for constant supervision by staff. Teachers nurture purposeful relationships with pupils and have high expectations of good behaviour in lessons. Pupils told us that low-level disruption occurs rarely.
- In 2016, pupils made more progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. Leaders responded rapidly and introduced additional strategies to improve pupils' writing. Teachers know individual pupils well and the barriers that were preventing some from meeting the greater depth standard. Pupils' progress is very carefully monitored and teachers quickly provide support where needed. Skilled teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities as a result of their careful planning with teachers.
- In all years, pupils' writing has improved in English and other subjects across the curriculum. Pupils have more confidence than previously in spelling, using grammar and punctuation, and extending vocabulary. They are introducing more complex structures into their writing.
- You have accurately analysed the reasons why some pupils' outcomes in mathematics are not as good as in reading and have an appropriate plan for improvement. Middle leaders have worked with leaders of mathematics from other schools to extend their subject knowledge. Teachers have created a more challenging curriculum and have raised their expectations for pupils' achievement. Generally, pupils work hard in lessons and produce work of a high standard. However, occasionally some teachers are slow to move pupils on in mathematics, so they spend too long practising sums they can already do and do not get onto more complex problem-solving and reasoning.
- You have made effective use of the additional funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils. The majority of disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously in reading and writing and the standard of their work is similar to that of other pupils. You have rightly prioritised the small proportion of

disadvantaged pupils in Years 5, 6 and 7 who do not achieve as well as expected in mathematics, so that they catch up quickly.

- Pupils and parents appreciate activities provided for lower-attaining pupils in Year 7 to catch up in literacy and numeracy. Pupils' confidence increases and they develop higher aspirations for their own achievement. Last year, low-attaining pupils continued to make good progress in English but have not sustained progress in mathematics to the end of Year 8.
- Senior leaders look carefully to identify any differences between the achievement of boys and girls. Middle leaders have researched and implemented helpful strategies to increase the engagement of boys, including by introducing curriculum topics that boys find more appealing. As a result, boys' achievement is improving. However, some boys give little care to the presentation of their work, making it difficult to refer to in future lessons and for revision, risking their progress being slowed. In some lessons, boys are less likely to ask for help when needed and staff do not reliably notice this.
- Leaders closely track the progress of the most able pupils and recognise the priority to ensure that a larger proportion achieve higher standards in national tests at the end of Year 6. Teachers have developed their understanding of the requirements of the new tests. Senior leaders' collaboration with a local grammar school has led to teachers raising their expectations of pupils and increasing the level of challenge. Consequently, the standard of work produced by the majority of the most able pupils is high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently apply rigour, in all subjects, to ensuring all groups of pupils make and sustain good progress, including disadvantaged pupils, boys and those who are most able
- the lowest attaining pupils make faster rates of progress in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Roche
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, staff and governors. They scrutinised the school's website, policies on safeguarding and child protection, your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, the school's development plan and other documentation. With leaders, inspectors visited classrooms to see teaching, learning and assessment across a range of subjects. There were formal meetings with pupils as well as discussions with them around the school. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in English, mathematics, design and technology, French and religious education. Inspectors took account of the 192 parent responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and their written comments, the 43 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaires and staff comments, and 183 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.