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Mr Steve Kelly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kelly

Short inspection of Arnold Academy

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2017 with John Lucas, Her Majesty's 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 Arnold Academy was judged to be good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and further developed the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have restructured the leadership team to focus more strongly on improving teaching and learning, and on supporting all aspects of pupils' personal development. The impact of this is already evident in the improved achievement and well-being of pupils. You have been diligent in pursuing more refined ways to provide precise support for pupils as individuals.

Pupils are courteous, hardworking, and keen to learn. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, and parents are confident in the quality of education that you are providing. The school is a vibrant, welcoming environment, which celebrates pupils' successes.

Since the previous inspection, standards have continued to rise. Pupils make good progress in key stage 2 and key stage 3. Leaders have also worked hard to improve attendance. In particular, as a result of the focused attention of the pastoral team, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils this year has risen considerably.

While most pupils make good progress in their time at the school, you have identified that the most able pupils are not always making rapid enough progress in order to attain the highest grades. You acknowledge that some of your monitoring of teaching is not yet sharp enough in identifying the actions that teachers need to take to ensure that groups of pupils make consistently rapid progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding, where pupils feel safe and staff are vigilant about pupils' safety and well-being. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are well trained in the most up-to-date guidance, including the 'Prevent' duty, which supports pupils who are vulnerable to extremism or radicalisation. Staff make appropriate referrals to leaders. Leaders use this information well to make timely and effective referrals to external agencies. You also ensure that your wider curriculum helps pupils to understand how to stay safe, especially through 'community time' lessons.

Leaders and staff have worked hard to establish a supportive community ethos in the school. In particular, the development of a pupil-centred behaviour system, written for and by pupils, supports them to make safe choices. Pupils speak highly of the 'Arnold Academy Charter' which exemplifies the agreed expectations of behaviour and of pupils' attitudes towards each other.

Leaders' development of the 'hub' as a place for pupils to seek advice and support when they need it has strengthened their well-being. Pupils told us that teachers 'teach us to be safe' and that bullying is 'not tolerated here'. Where pupils do have any concerns, they trust staff to support them in resolving the issues appropriately. Your approach of restorative conversations between pupils means any conflicts or concerns are dealt with and pupils develop positive relationships with one another.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry was to review how effectively leaders secure the progress of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. This was because the progress for this group of pupils has been below the national level for the past three years.
- You use previous assessments and your own analysis of pupils' abilities when they start school in Year 5 to establish their starting points and plan for learning accordingly. Half-termly assessments and regular work scrutiny help leaders and teachers to track the progress of pupils. However, while the level of this detail is supporting teachers to plan well to meet most pupils' learning needs, you have identified that there is more to do to ensure rapid progress is made by the most-able.
- My second key line of enquiry was to look at how pupils achieve in Years 7 and 8 and how well prepared they are to move on to their key stage 4 studies. This is because there is no nationally published information that shows how your pupils are achieving when they move on to their next school.
- Pupils access a wide-ranging and rich curriculum that gives them a wealth of opportunities to develop their interests and achieve well. Leaders' tracking of pupils' progress in Years 7 and 8 continues to be rigorous. You and your leaders keep abreast of national changes at all key stages and use this to inform the school's curriculum. As a result, pupils make good progress in key stage 3.

- Your staff co-plan with the Harlington Upper School, to ensure that the curriculum develops seamlessly between the two schools because most of your pupils attend this school when they leave you. Pupils told inspectors that the school 'focuses me on my future'. The headteacher of Harlington Upper School spoke of your pupils being 'ready' for study at GCSE. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for their next school.
- My third line of enquiry was to review pupils' achievement in Years 5 and 6. This is because your previous inspection outlined the need to further increase pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 so that attainment continued to rise.
- You have identified that feedback and guidance to pupils were the main areas for you to develop, in order to increase pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6. You have put in place a feedback system that requires teachers to support pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their progress. Analysis of pupils' books shows that, in key subjects, pupils are able to practise and improve their work and understanding, based on the guidance that their teachers give them.
- In the lessons that we visited together, it was clear that there is consistency in teachers' work. Most notably, the support that teachers give to pupils in English, science, humanities and mathematics was of a very high quality and made a real difference to the progress that pupils were making. For example, in mathematics we saw pupils developing their understanding of equations following high-quality guidance from their teacher.
- Pupils told us that teachers' feedback 'gives me the confidence to write more', for example. This personalised targeted support allows pupils to make progress in line with others nationally with the same starting points. Leaders' tracking of pupils' progress allows you to identify where teachers need to focus in order to make effective progress.
- You provide pupils with additional in-class support, one-to-one tutoring and small-group sessions which help to develop any gaps that are identified in their learning. In some instances, the feedback given to pupils is insufficiently challenging so they do not make all the progress they are capable of.
- During inspectors' visits to classes in both key stages 2 and 3, you acknowledged that some of your leaders' monitoring of teaching quality is not precise enough. In particular, leaders do not give teachers specific enough targets that will make a difference to the progress that groups of pupils make. This is an area for improvement that you have identified in your school action plan.
- My final line of enquiry was to review how leaders were securing improved attendance for disadvantaged pupils. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils was below the national rate for all pupils in 2016.
- You have rightly made clear your high expectations of pupils' attendance to parents, demonstrating how this can affect pupils' outcomes. The recently established pastoral team has implemented a preventative programme for pupils whose attendance falls below your expectations.

- Pastoral leaders work effectively with parents and outside agencies to develop personalised support plans for pupils and their families. The impact of these measures has led to a significant increase in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers appropriately challenge the most able pupils so that they make more rapid progress and attain the highest standards they can by the end of year 6 and year 8
- teachers consistently deliver high-quality feedback that allows pupils to make the progress they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Gwyneth Gibson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you, leaders, pupil support coordinators and teachers. Inspectors also met with representatives from the governing body, and from the Harlington Area Schools Trust. An inspector spoke to the headteacher of Harlington Upper School by telephone.

Inspectors visited classrooms with senior leaders and reviewed pupils' work, most notably that of the most able pupils. Inspectors also undertook a scrutiny of the work of pupils from across the age and ability range. Inspectors spoke with pupils during the day and had formal meetings with pupils from key stages 2 and 3.

Inspectors took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, from 101 parents, as well as feedback from 90 pupils and 50 members of staff. They also reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to school development planning, self-evaluation, the spending of additional funding related to pupil premium, safeguarding arrangements and pupils' progress.