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Mr Keith Hales
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Dear Mr Hales

Short inspection of Beaminster School

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Malcolm Davison, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

When you were appointed in September 2014, the school had a large budget deficit. Working with governors, you overcame the constraints this placed on the school and stabilised its finances. Since then, you have been resolute in your drive to raise the aspirations of all pupils. You have introduced major curriculum reorganisation and instigated a step change in professional development for staff at the school. Staff are left in no doubt that they are responsible for developing their practice. As a result of these higher expectations hitting home, the quality of teaching has improved.

Pupils and staff appreciate your approachable yet determined leadership. At the same time as raising the expectations staff have of what pupils can achieve, you have maintained the Christian ethos of the school. You have a strong commitment to inclusion. The school has a specialist resource base for pupils who have complex learning needs. This offers effective provision for pupils from a wide area. You have ensured that these pupils are integrated into the life of the school.

The school is smaller than the average school. Your staff know the pupils well and are able to support them effectively. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. They are proud of their school and speak highly of their teachers. In

particular, they express a strong moral duty to respect and accept others. Your school has a relatively small proportion of disadvantaged pupils. In the past, these pupils did not achieve well. You have taken steps to remedy this and, consequently, their progress has increased rapidly in most subject areas.

You have addressed the issues raised at the previous inspection. The assessment of pupils in the specialist resource provision is now more accurate. A central record of assessments is used to keep a sharp eye on pupils' progress in the resource base. Working closely with parents, you have reduced the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school. However, overall attendance remains stubbornly below the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

In 2016, pupils' progress in the GCSE subjects of the English Baccalaureate was in line with the national average. However, pupils' progress in GCSE English declined and was below the national average. In response to this, you took decisive action to improve the quality of teaching in English. Information supplied by the school indicates that pupils' progress in GCSE English in 2017 improved significantly. Sixth-form students enjoy the range of courses and opportunities you offer them through the joint arrangement with The Sir John Colfox Academy. In 2016, students' overall progress was in line with the national average. However, the most able students' progress was above average.

At the time of the previous inspection, a large proportion of key stage 4 pupils took vocational qualifications. You recognised that some of these qualifications were not appropriate for many pupils. You reviewed the key stage 4 curriculum and made changes as a result. Pupils currently in the school are now studying a more appropriate balance of academic and vocational courses.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Policies and practices reflect the latest guidance. Your leaders who have specific responsibilities for safeguarding are clear about their roles and responsibilities. You have ensured that all staff and governors are aware of the risks pupils face and follow clear procedures when they have concerns. When necessary, you make brisk referrals to external agencies to provide extra help. Risk assessments are detailed and proportionate. For example, you have carefully considered the security of the site and taken steps to ensure pupils' safety.

You have maintained a positive atmosphere in the school. Safeguarding issues are discussed openly and honestly. As a result, pupils are confident and safe and feel very well cared for. They respect each other and their teachers. The great majority of parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, believe their child is safe and taught well. Parents recognise that bullying, in any form, is rare at the school. This is confirmed by pupils. They explained to inspectors that they receive good-quality academic and pastoral help from the student support and guidance centre. This is a strength of the school.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. They have an accurate view of the school and communicate this well to governors. Consequently, the governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors recognise that raising pupils' aspirations remains a priority for the future.
- In order to decide if the school remained good, the first line of enquiry addressed the progress of pupils in English and science. Even though pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics, science, languages and humanities subjects were all in line with the national average in 2016, their progress in English was below average. This was a significant factor contributing to the low overall progress of pupils across eight GCSE subjects in 2016. Teachers' focus on improving pupils' writing, particularly for boys, has paid off. For example, teachers have developed pupils' abilities in paragraphing and writing extended sentences. Pupils now read a wider range of texts. This work improved pupils' progress in GCSE English rapidly last year and so their attainment in 2017 was significantly better than previously.
- Pupils' progress in physics, chemistry and biology has been strong in recent years. However, those pupils who take other GCSE science qualifications do not achieve as highly. Most pupils in key stage 4 are given work that interests and engages them. However, this is not the case for all pupils. Some pupils are not being challenged sufficiently to develop a deep understanding of the subject and so they make less progress.
- The second line of enquiry looked at the suitability of the curriculum. Senior leaders are committed to providing a curriculum that fulfils the needs and capabilities of pupils. Their rationale for curriculum design takes local labour market information into consideration but also recognises entry requirements for training and employment opportunities nationally and internationally. It acknowledges, for example, the necessity of academic qualifications for many apprenticeship programmes. Pupils are now given better advice and guidance at the point of making subject choices. As a result, more pupils are choosing from the English Baccalaureate suite of academic GCSE subjects. The curriculum is now meeting current pupils' needs more closely. Pupils are offered courses which prepare them for the widest range of career pathways, including entry into the best universities. Senior leaders recognise the need to further raise pupils' aspirations in key stage 3, so that pupils have the confidence to choose key stage 4 courses which stretch them academically.
- The third line of enquiry focused on the impact that pupil premium funding is having on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Governors carefully review the use of this extra funding. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attained GCSE grade C or above in both English and mathematics in 2016 rose rapidly towards other pupils nationally and was close to the attainment of their peers in school. Senior leaders continue to raise teachers' awareness of the needs of this group. The mechanism for identifying any issues which hinder the progress of these pupils has been streamlined and so the response of the school is timely. While disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in many areas, they have not improved as much in key stage 3 history or mathematics.

Disadvantaged pupils who spoke to inspectors were articulate and self-assured. They have great confidence in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in science are given more opportunities to think deeply about the subject and so extend their understanding
- teachers encourage pupils to make aspirational course choices for key stage 4
- middle leaders share good practice in promoting disadvantaged pupils' progress so that there is greater consistency across the school
- disadvantaged pupils' attendance improves.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we held meetings with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I had a telephone conversation with a school improvement adviser who has been working with the school in recent years. We held meetings with pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and spoke with many other pupils informally. We made observations of learning across the school jointly with senior leaders. We looked at examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. We scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, assessment information, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to attendance. I considered two letters from members of the local community. We took account of responses to questionnaires from 12 staff and considered 78 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.