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Dear Mr Litchfield

Short inspection of The Knights Templar School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 2017 with Her Majesty's Inspector Gwyneth Gibson, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have high aspirations for pupils, which permeate throughout the school and which have a positive impact on the progress pupils make from their different starting points. Examination results at key stage 4 and key stage 5 are consistently good, and you routinely monitor outcomes to identify areas for further improvement.

You have been vigilant in implementing the recommendations from the previous inspection and a spirit of continuous improvement is evident in the school. Leaders take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching to ensure that it is consistently strong. They are effective in taking appropriate actions where improvements are needed. Most teachers are proactive in developing their own practice and value your support in doing so.

For the last two years, you have focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching meets the needs of different pupils. As leaders, you take swift and careful action if pupils fall behind. This has had a positive impact on the progress disadvantaged pupils make, which is in line with other pupils nationally. Most pupils make good progress across the school.

A large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed the view that the school is well led. This view was also expressed by the respondents to the staff survey. Parent and staff comments are positive about all aspects of your work. My visit provided clear evidence that they are right to have this confidence in you and in your team. You continue to ensure that the pupils in your care are safe and well educated.

In responding to their survey and in speaking to inspectors, pupils were particularly positive about the extent to which you encourage them to be independent. They value being asked to take on responsibilities. Pupils learn to treat others with respect. You promote the school values of 'courage and courtesy' well. Pupils value the extra-curricular activities available to them, and spoke with enthusiasm about the range of trips on offer, including the 'unforgettable' ski trips.

You work well with your governing body. They are capable, knowledgeable and interested, and, under the guidance of their new chair, increasingly involved. Governors' review of their own practice has been effective in leading to changes in the way they work. They are determined to support and challenge you as you maintain and build on the high standards you have established.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders have ensured that checks on staff and other adults in the school are properly completed and recorded. The school's record of recruitment checks is thorough, clear and up to date, and systems ensure that staff do not begin employment until all necessary checks are carried out.

Leaders have a good understanding of the risks to pupils in the local area and act to minimise these. Leaders involve external agencies where appropriate and put in place measures to look after pupils in and outside of school. Pupils are well informed about issues such as radicalisation and e-safety through visiting speakers, assemblies and personal, social and health education, and leaders use a weekly parental bulletin to share information with parents.

Recent initiatives to enhance the safety of pupils have included putting up fences around the school site and installing a computer system to record all child protection information centrally. Leaders are increasingly held to account by governors with regard to safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry to ascertain that the school remained good was to review the difference in the performance of boys and girls at key stage 4. In the past, girls have made better progress than boys. In 2016, this trend was reversed and boys outperformed girls. In 2016, middle and higher prior-attaining boys

outperformed their peers nationally in mathematics, but the progress of lower prior-attaining boys was below that of their peers nationally.

- You demonstrated that the improvement in boys' progress in 2016 was the result of a deliberate strategy to bring their GCSE achievements in line with those of girls. You are rightly proud of this achievement, and you have now successfully increased the progress rates of girls.
- The performance of different ability groups in mathematics is more consistent for pupils currently at the school. You are now focused on improving the progress of lower and middle prior-attaining boys in Year 11 in a range of subjects so that it is as good as the most able boys.
- As part of another line of enquiry, we reviewed the progress of different groups of students at A level. Not all students achieved the same high standards. In both 2015 and 2016, girls' achievement was above expectations, while boys' achievement was in line with national expectations. Over the same period, non-disadvantaged students made more progress from their starting points than disadvantaged students.
- You monitor progress in the sixth form closely and put support in place to ensure the best outcomes for all students. For example, you have recently increased the teaching time for A-level subjects. You have also implemented new programmes to support students with their A-level study skills, which are designed to benefit all students and disadvantaged students in particular.
- The difference in the progress made by disadvantaged students and others in the sixth form has now diminished. Disadvantaged students achieve the same high standard as others in the school. In Year 13, at the end of the 2016/17 academic year, more boys met their targets than girls. This continues to be an area you rightly monitor as fewer boys currently in Year 13 are reaching their stringent targets than girls.
- Another line of enquiry was how well the school meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils and of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in key stage 4. This was because, while these pupils achieved broadly in line with national averages, other pupils in the school achieved above national averages in several subjects.
- Since the previous inspection, you have effectively secured and sustained improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at key stage 4. In both 2015 and 2016, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils improved so that it was similar to that of other pupils nationally.
- Leaders at all levels concentrate on supporting disadvantaged pupils at GCSE so that their progress can be greater than that of other pupils nationally. You have effective systems in place for supporting disadvantaged pupils' behaviour and attendance and you track their progress closely. Subject leaders use a range of approaches to secure positive outcomes and evaluate the impact of their work to ensure that it is effective for this significant group. You are ambitious for disadvantaged pupils and their attainment continues to rise. However, they still do not make as much progress as other pupils in the school. We agreed that this should continue to be a focus for the school.

- Your work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been successful over time. In 2015 and 2016, they made progress similar to that of all pupils nationally. However, while the progress these pupils make is in line with all pupils nationally, it is still not as good as the progress made by all other groups in the school. You recognise the need to be more rigorous in providing timely support for these pupils, particularly where their behaviour interrupts their learning.
- The other line of enquiry I pursued was the consistency of the quality of teaching in the school. Examination results over time indicate that pupils perform better in some subject areas than others. Your previous Ofsted inspection report revealed some variability in the quality of teaching and recommended that you share best practice and enable all managers to judge the quality of teaching. That inspection also asked you to ensure that monitoring activities are always recorded and followed up.
- Leaders across the school use effective systems to monitor the quality of teaching. Leaders have a clear understanding of what the best teaching is and they are able to accurately assess the quality of education pupils receive. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching across the school.
- Where teaching is not as strong, leaders make timely interventions which secure improvement. Professional development is part of the school culture. The vast majority of staff who responded to the Ofsted survey feel that senior leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support improvements. They also feel trusted to innovate for the benefit of pupils. While the quality of teaching varies, weaker practice is not allowed to persist. Pupils make good progress because of this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities directly meets their behavioural and learning needs, so that they make more rapid progress
- the difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils at key stage 4 continues to diminish
- pupils make good or better progress in all areas of the curriculum due to consistently strong teaching in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Andy Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we spoke with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of four governors. We met with pupils, visited lessons and looked at performance data.

We reviewed a range of documentation relating to governance, the school's self-evaluation, provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, safeguarding and analysis of spending of pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding.

We considered the 264 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire to parents, Parent View, 168 responses to the pupil survey and 51 responses to the staff survey.