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2 November 2017

Mrs Goodchild  
Headteacher  
Chelmer Valley High School  
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Dear Mrs Goodchild

### **Short inspection of Chelmer Valley High School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 October 2017 with Her Majesty's Inspector Gerard Batty, 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 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 and your staff provide a very positive ethos across the school that nurtures pupils' academic and personal development and enables them to thrive as learners. As we visited lessons together, you demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of your staff and pupils and showed an astute analysis of the effect of teaching on pupils' learning.

You have managed recent changes to the senior leadership team exceptionally well. As a result, you have created an effective team of leaders that gives you strong support. Members of the team assist you in leading the school with energy, drive and a clear focus on what will make the most difference to pupils' learning and personal development. The leadership team has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and acts swiftly to address any issues of underperformance. Consequently, most pupils achieve well. Overall, results at GCSE are above average and reflect an improving trend.

You and your leadership team are continuing to improve the quality of teaching, particularly questioning, and ensuring that work is sufficiently demanding, both of which were areas for improvement from the school's previous inspection. We saw

many examples of good questioning by teachers that helped to deepen pupils' understanding of their work. We also saw some examples of less effective questioning, including in the sixth form, which did not extend learning enough. You are working to improve this and it was clear where these efforts to continue to improve teaching have yielded success. In most cases, the work pupils are given provides them with an appropriate level of challenge. You are also ensuring that pupils get enough done and do not work too slowly in lessons. We agreed, however, that there is still work to do to ensure that teachers consistently set work at an appropriate level for different ability groups, especially the most able, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Overall, the school provides a productive and purposeful learning environment, and pupils concentrate well on their work in lessons. They are very good at working with one another to discuss their ideas and deepen their thinking. Consequently, pupils are able to explain their work and show effective understanding of what they are expected to learn.

Around the school, pupils are polite and courteous. They are considerate of others, and treat one another and adults with respect. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and want to do well. They participate well in the wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities offered by staff. Pupils feel safe, well looked after and supported in school.

Most parents are very positive about the school and the education it provides for their children. The vast majority of those who provided written comments were fulsome in their praise, making points such as 'Teachers go the extra mile in ensuring that classes are engaging and encouraging, as well as educational.' Parents of Year 7 pupils who responded were particularly pleased about the successful start their children have made to their secondary education.

Pupils attend regularly and the school has put in place effective systems to address past issues of lower attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Hence, attendance rates for these groups are now rising rapidly.

Governors provide good support to the school and question and challenge leaders effectively about its performance. They think strategically about the school's future and its place within the local community.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school has systems in place to safeguard its pupils. All adults who work in or visit the school are carefully checked and vetted to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Staff are well trained so that they know how to identify and deal with any safeguarding or child protection concerns.

Safeguarding records are of high quality and well maintained. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding are able to track progress in dealing with safeguarding issues that have been identified. The school works effectively with other external agencies and professionals to safeguard its pupils.

## Inspection findings

- In carrying out this inspection, we followed a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on evaluating the school's pupil premium strategy and its success in promoting the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. This was because there have been some differences between the performance of these pupils, especially the most able disadvantaged, and that of others. You and your senior leader with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils have monitored the performance of this group of pupils carefully. Your own analysis shows that the school is doing well with pupils of low and middle ability who are disadvantaged, but those of high ability are not being extended enough to achieve the high standards of which they are capable. Thus, you put in place a number of good strategies at the start of this year to give additional focus and support to the most able disadvantaged pupils. Some positive impact is evident, but it is too soon to properly assess the full effect of these.
- Teachers are aware of targeting this group more effectively in lessons to work at a higher level. Visits to lessons and discussions with pupils indicate that, while improving, the challenge for the most able disadvantaged pupils is not yet consistently high and work is at times too easy. Some disadvantaged pupils say that they would find it helpful if teachers checked up on them more in lessons to ensure that they are keeping up with the rest of the class. In addition, there are further strategies that the school has not yet explored or investigated but which could also help the most able disadvantaged pupils to achieve better.
- The second line of enquiry was to ascertain how effectively the school is supporting girls in the sixth form to achieve well. This is because results in the sixth form have not been good overall in the past two years. While many groups performed well, data from 2016 indicated that the performance of girls, particularly middle-ability girls, was not good enough. The school's A-level results for 2017 indicate that the issue of performance in the sixth form has been down to lower performance of middle-ability students, including some girls, as opposed to an issue about girls.
- Having thoroughly analysed your data and considered in depth the issues in learning in the sixth form, you have taken a wide range of actions over the last year to improve provision to ensure that students are entered for the right courses and have the right GCSE results to secure success in their chosen A levels. Sixth-form teachers are more secure about the examination criteria for the new style of A levels that have been introduced and have raised the level of challenge.
- Our observations of the sixth form indicated effective teaching and learning and a good level of challenge most of the time for students, including girls and middle-ability students. Sixth-form students themselves are positive about their learning experiences and feel that they are well supported by their teachers. They were particularly complimentary about the speed with which teachers mark assignments and how helpful they find the feedback in improving their work. One student commented that, while they were treated more as adults in the sixth

form, teachers did not allow any 'slacking'. Consequently, students in both Years 12 and 13 are on track to achieve well this year.

- The final key line of enquiry was the extent to which the curriculum was meeting the needs of the most able pupils and supporting learning in greater depth. This was because relatively few pupils took the English Baccalaureate subjects in 2016 and 2017. These include GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, history or geography and a modern foreign language.
- In discussion with you, we were able to see that the school provides a wide range of provision for the most able. For example, a high proportion of pupils take the three separate sciences at GCSE.
- An increasing number of pupils are taking at least one language at GCSE. This has not been a strongly performing area but recent developments you have instituted are having a positive effect on improving the quality of teaching and learning in modern foreign languages. In the lessons we visited together, pupils were keen to speak in French and to test our French speaking skills. Provision in history is also improving. Overall, an increasing number of pupils are taking the English Baccalaureate subjects in key stage 4.
- The school is developing the depth of the curriculum across all subjects in key stage 3 to help prepare pupils even more effectively for the increasingly demanding work they need to tackle in key stage 4. This work is not complete and needs to be continued.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' questioning in lessons is consistently effective and work is set at the right level for different groups of pupils, especially the most able
- the most able disadvantaged pupils make better progress and attain as well as other most able pupils at the end of key stage 4
- they further develop the curriculum at key stage 3 so that it provides pupils with good opportunities to develop their learning in depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Gulshanbir Kayembe  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

We met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and agree the lines of enquiry. In addition, we held meetings with three members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors, members of the senior leadership team, a sample group of subject leaders and a representative from the local authority with whom the school continues to work.

The inspection team looked at a variety of documents and records, including your self-evaluation summary, the school improvement plan and the school's assessment information. We also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to attendance and behaviour.

We undertook observations across the school jointly with you and another member of the senior leadership team. We talked to pupils about their learning, as well as looking at their books. We observed pupils around the school and held a discussion with a group of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and a group of sixth-form students. The pupils from key stages 3 and 4 brought their books for us to look at.

Finally, we took into account the 148 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as written comments from 71 parents.