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Mr Jim Adams
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Adams

Short inspection of Hobart High School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Kay Leach, 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 and your senior colleagues have led the school with dedication, consistency and rigour. A large majority of pupils, staff and parents recognise and appreciate the way you have brought coherent systems and structures to the school, which help create an environment in which all pupils can achieve well. You have been determined to help fulfil the school motto of 'excellence in a caring community'.

All pupils receive very strong levels of support, guidance and care and they feel highly valued. As a result, pupils behave very well. They say that they feel smart in their new blazers. Pupils are very proud of their school and clearly enjoy attending. They wholeheartedly take advantage of extra-curricular opportunities. They are polite and courteous to adults and each other. They move around the site in a calm and orderly fashion and treat their facilities with care and consideration.

Teaching continues to improve. There is a focused and purposeful atmosphere in all lessons. Pupils work hard and with enthusiasm. They maintain neat and clear written records of their work, which will aid future revision. Teachers create and sustain positive trusting relationships. They consistently use the school's assessment system to provide concise and helpful feedback.

You and your senior colleagues have focused appropriately on following the recommendations made in the previous inspection report. You have worked successfully to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. You have pursued a range of strategies to enhance pupils' learning skills and strengthen their involvement and engagement, both in lessons and in the wider life of the school. Pupils feel that the school is now much more receptive to their opinions, for example through the 'pupil voice' programme.

You are clear that there is still much to be done if the school is to become outstanding. You know where the strengths and weaknesses of the school are and you have constructed focused and relevant plans for future improvement. Most importantly, you understand that it is a priority that you address the remaining inconsistency in pupils' achievement between different subject areas within the school. You have enhanced the programme of training available for staff, and extended opportunities that teachers have to share effective practice so that, over time, all teaching can be as strong as the best.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have created and sustained a culture of safeguarding within the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Pupils all say that there is an adult in the school they trust to speak to if they have a problem. They say that they feel very safe at the school. The school has invested significantly in new fencing for the perimeter of the school and this has enhanced the security of the site. This has been hugely appreciated by pupils and parents.

The curriculum helps pupils to deal with any risks they may routinely face, including the use of the internet and social networking sites. Pupils report that the advice they receive does help to shape their behaviour. Pupils are confident that poor behaviour, including bullying, is rare and dealt with effectively if it does occur. This impression is well supported by the school's record-keeping of any such incidents.

Staff are quick in identifying any concerns that they have about pupils and following them up with due urgency. They liaise effectively with external agencies so that pupils get the support that they require quickly. Information is shared effectively with parents and carers on these occasions, and constructive working relationships with other agencies help to keep children safe. The school successfully coordinates the care and welfare of children looked after who attend the school.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 and 2017, pupils at key stage 4 made progress overall which was above the national average. They made progress which was well above average in English and mathematics and, overall, across the subjects of the English Baccalaureate. However, on average, they did much less well in a number of their other subjects, particularly in some of the subjects they chose as options outside the English Baccalaureate.

- My first line of enquiry, therefore, was to establish the reasons for this unevenness in performance. School leaders accept that, over time, teaching has not been as strong in these areas. This has meant that, despite many recent improvements, there has not been sufficient opportunity to compensate completely for previously weaker teaching and to see the impact on pupils' key stage 4 results.
- School leaders were able to explain a range of strategies which have been put in place to promote consistently positive outcomes across all subjects. They have introduced much more rigorous systems of quality assurance. These involve a thorough programme of departmental reviews, including lesson observation and work scrutiny, and the systematic analysis of information about pupils' performance during each term. The information gathered has helped leaders shape a programme of training which is meticulously tailored to the specific needs of individual staff.
- The school's own performance information suggests that underperforming subjects are now catching up, both during key stage 4 and lower down the school. Evidence gathered during this inspection was consistent with this evaluation.
- I was also keen to investigate whether some of the difference in performance may also have been due to the way the curriculum is structured, or in the way that school leaders prioritise and value the different subjects within it. School leaders provided convincing evidence that this was not the case.
- Leaders and governors are entirely committed to providing a curriculum with sufficient breadth and balance. They have provided sufficient teaching time for all subjects to achieve well. They have continually evaluated the curriculum and worked hard to increase the range of options open to pupils, including provision for more vocational subjects. They have introduced high levels of support in order to develop and improve all subjects, even where the number of pupils taking them is small. Pupils feel that they are well guided and supported in the choices they make at the end of key stage 3.
- A further key focus for this inspection was to explore the provision for disadvantaged pupils at the school, and to investigate how far school leaders understand which strategies are having the most positive impact on the progress of this pupil group. Disadvantaged pupils make progress which is broadly in line with that made by non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. However, the school does not publish sufficient information on its website about how it decides to spend the dedicated funding to support these pupils.
- Evidence from this inspection demonstrates that leaders and governors are exceedingly thorough in their evaluation of the strategies they use to support these disadvantaged pupils. They are clear how particular barriers that are relevant to Hobart High School, such as those connected to the rural character of the area, can act to hinder these pupils making the same progress as their peers.
- They have analysed the effectiveness of the strategies deployed last year and can explain how these had been sharpened this year to provide more individually tailored approaches for pupils. The school understands that it is disadvantaged

pupils who arrive with average prior attainment who make the weakest progress.

- My last line of enquiry was to investigate how the school is working to ensure that pupils of all abilities make really strong progress. Although they still make sound progress, those pupils who join the school with attainment which is above the national average do not make as much progress overall as those with lower starting points. The school recognises that this is an important group whose attainment needs to improve if overall progress within the school is to be strengthened and be well above the national average.
- The school has adopted a range of strategies to accelerate further the progress of their most able pupils in lessons. Teachers do know who the most able pupils in their classes are. They frequently provide a range of tasks on the topic being taught, including questions aimed specifically at stretching the most able.
- However, some most able pupils reported that teachers did not always spend as much time explaining how to achieve highly on these more challenging questions as they did ensuring that pupils who had fallen behind could catch up. As a result, high-attaining pupils were sometimes unclear about what would represent excellence in their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to address the remaining inconsistencies in the progress pupils make between different subjects and departments
- they sharpen further the strategies they deploy for strengthening the progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those with average starting points
- they communicate their evaluation of these strategies effectively through the school website
- they continue to enhance the teaching of the most able pupils to ensure that they make progress which is as strong as that of their peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, teachers, governors and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team. We scrutinised a range of school documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, safeguarding records and information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. We considered the views expressed in 56 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 55 free-text responses, together with 83 questionnaires returned by pupils and 39 returned by school staff.