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Mr Charlie Guthrie
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Dear Mr Guthrie

Short inspection of Wilmington Grammar School for Boys

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 2017 with Ann Fearon, Ofsted 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 the school was judged to be good in March 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 have taken decisive action to improve the school, initially while on secondment and since September 2017 as headteacher. You have been supported well by the executive headteacher from the Endeavour Multi Academy Trust and quickly identified the areas that needed improvement. You have raised the aspirations of staff and ensured that they understand the actions needed to improve pupils' outcomes. Your clear focus on improving teaching and learning is supported well by staff. Leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They are clear about the strategies needed to improve learning further. Consequently, teachers now have a much more accurate understanding of what makes good teaching and effective feedback to pupils.

Pupils are being set more ambitious targets to raise expectations. They are provided with work that is more challenging. The impact of these actions is already seen in the improved progress of Year 11 pupils in 2017. Pupils commented that they are being given more difficult work to do. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well and make similar progress to that of their peers. Pupils are provided with a broad range of additional activities beyond the timetabled curriculum. Sixth-form students take responsibility for the school council, which provides them with leadership opportunities. Pupils are very positive about the school and morale is high. Almost all parents who responded to

Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school.

Governors are ambitious for the school and know its strengths and weaknesses very well. They provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed well. Middle leaders, supported by senior leaders, monitor effectively the quality of teaching. Middle leaders are able to track pupils more effectively because senior leaders provide them with better-quality information. This enables teachers to respond swiftly to support pupils who are not making the expected progress.

Some of the most able students entering the sixth form have not always achieved the highest grades and made the progress that would be expected of them. Leaders have taken decisive action to increase the challenge in lessons and raise students' expectations. This has led to an increase in the number of students entering higher education this September. Leaders recognise that the intake profile into the sixth form is changing and they need to offer a broader range of courses to better meet students' needs and aspirations.

You have rightly focused on improving literacy across the school. Teachers thoroughly understand the approaches that are needed to support this drive. The levels of literacy of pupils entering the school are much lower than their mathematical skills. Teachers have worked effectively to improve pupils' writing skills. Leaders' drive to improve literacy is leading to pupils producing a better quality of written work, especially in key stage 4, when compared to previous years. The focus on literacy needs to be maintained.

Leaders are not ensuring that the school's agreed approach to assessment is consistently followed by staff. Where teachers follow the agreed approach well, pupils know how to improve their work. This is particularly evident in mathematics, in which pupils are able to take more responsibility for their own learning and make rapid progress as a result.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All necessary checks of staff and visitors have been undertaken and records are meticulously kept. Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils remain safe. For example, any attendance issues are promptly followed up by staff. Governors and staff receive regular safeguarding update training, and the governors routinely check safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are compliant.

Pupils feel safe in the school. They have a good understanding of mental and sexual health issues, online e-safety and radicalisation. Pupils commented that staff deal promptly with the little bullying there is. They feel supported well by staff and know whom to talk to if they have concerns. There is a zero-tolerance approach to homophobic and transgender bullying and pupils have been taught well. As a result,

they feel more confident in being able to talk about issues of sexuality. Sixth-form students are very positive about the support they receive from teachers.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the variation in outcomes between subjects; the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and Black African pupils; sixth-form provision and the impact of the school's literacy strategy.
- You have ensured that there is a consistent approach to teaching and learning in lessons by setting out core expectations for teachers. This has been received positively by them. Where teachers closely follow the school's agreed approach to assessment, pupils know how to improve their work. Where teachers' feedback to pupils is strong, as in mathematics, pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are deepened.
- Leaders are helping teachers to improve pupils' outcomes further by linking with other local grammar schools to share good practice and moderate pupils' work. Your mathematics team, which challenges learners well, is a shining example of strong practice from which other subject teams with weaker outcomes can learn. Leaders' approach to improving literacy is also helping pupils to improve the quality of their written and oral work further.
- Disadvantaged pupils are working at a standard that is similar to, and often better than, that of other pupils. The effective strategies that leaders have introduced to support these pupils is having a positive impact. Your actions to address the previous poor attendance of this group have been successful, and disadvantaged pupils' attendance is now above the national average.
- Leaders know the school well and make effective use of data to identify areas of weakness. For example, leaders quickly identified Black African pupils as not doing as well as others in the school. The leadership team's prompt action through appropriate interventions, especially in supporting literacy, has led to these pupils now doing as well as others in the school.
- Teachers value the new opportunities for professional development and are positive about the school. Each department has a clear understanding of what it needs to do to improve further. You identify accurately the variations in the quality of teaching across the school and you are making use of the strong subject leaders to support teachers whose outcomes are not yet as good. Middle leaders understand the strategies required to support pupils well.
- Provision in the sixth form is good, but leaders have rightly identified the need to match courses more closely to the needs of students.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater consistency in teachers' using the school's agreed approach to

assessment to help pupils to make rapid progress

- the focus on literacy is continued, especially to support those pupils who have low levels of literacy on entry to the school
- the courses on offer in the sixth form are more closely matched to the needs and aspirations of students.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Lee
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the executive headteacher, your leadership team, the chair and a trustee of the Endeavour Multi Academy Trust. We met with your coordinator for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, the head of sixth form, a group of middle leaders and with other teachers. We met with pupils, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. We also met with sixth-form students to listen to their opinions on the provision made for post-16 education in your school.

Inspectors visited 10 lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and/or members of the leadership team. We examined a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school development plan, governors' minutes, information about current pupils' progress, including that of sixth-form students, and pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors considered 148 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 144 written responses, 34 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 194 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.