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Mr Matthew Allman
Headteacher
The Friary School
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Dear Mr Allman

Short inspection of The Friary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2017 with Gwendoline Onyon and Tracey Lord, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your appointment in September 2016 marked a turning point for the school. New approaches to teaching, a better curriculum, the introduction of a house system, changes in day-to-day organisation, and improvements to the physical environment have reinvigorated the school. Pupils and staff in the school speak warmly about the abundant energy and enthusiasm that characterises your leadership and the manner in which changes have been made.

A culture of high aspiration now pervades this rapidly improving school. Parents, pupils and staff recognise its upward momentum. Your unwavering commitment to helping all pupils achieve highly, through providing suitable support and challenge, has led to notable improvements in pupils' key stage 4 results. These are now excellent in English, history, and information and communications technology. Moreover, you have created a climate in the school where examination success, victories on the sports field, and great performances in the drama theatre are routinely achieved and celebrated.

The school has tackled the weaknesses in teaching identified at the last inspection. Teachers use assessment well to plan lessons and the school's behaviour code is implemented in classrooms consistently. More generally, lessons are very well planned and the curriculum offers suitable choice. Pupils are able to study the subjects of the national curriculum as well as vocational subjects. Pupils at the school are well prepared for the next stage of their education, including in the thriving and lively sixth form. They

develop into well-rounded individuals through their time at the school.

Most of the changes you have brought about are being implemented still. As such, they should deliver even greater benefits over the next two years. It will be important to monitor closely their further impact on helping students make even greater progress, particularly in weaker-performing subject areas.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is given high priority. Leaders in the school have ensured that the pupils are safeguarded well. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of different contexts, including when using the internet or social media. They are well supported by the school as they grow older and get ready to take their place in wider society. They are suitably aware of the risks posed by any extremist behaviour.

Pupils say that bullying is rare. It is dealt with sensibly and sensitively if it does occur. Pupils speak confidently about what they would do if they were concerned about their own safety or that of others. All potential safety concerns are taken seriously and handled properly by designated members of staff. Leaders in the school are robust in following through any referrals made to external agencies.

Governors play an important role in helping to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Individual governors have expertise in safeguarding, including in child protection, and governors understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. Governors have a good understanding of how the school keeps pupils safe. They exercise a suitable level of oversight, including when pupils go abroad on educational visits or trips.

Inspection findings

- New leadership at the school has tackled previous weaknesses resolutely. An ambitious programme of change has brought about significant improvements to teaching, the curriculum, to pupils' behaviour, to the way the school is organised, and to the fabric of the building. This has been accomplished with the full support of pupils, staff and governors in the context of significant reductions to funding.
- GCSE results have improved markedly because of better teaching. In 2017, the school's GCSE results show that pupils achieved very well. Pupils make good progress in the school. In English, they make excellent progress. In mathematics, pupils make good progress from their starting points. The school is now focusing on improving results further in geography and science.
- Pupils are very well behaved in lessons. Around the school, they are cooperative and friendly. In a very few instances, the conduct of older pupils during breaktime and lunchtime did not reflect the high standards of behaviour usually seen in the classroom.
- The school is an inclusive community. Pupils from different backgrounds learn to get

on well with one another. The school successfully prepares pupils for life in multicultural Britain, including by fostering understanding of the importance of British values. Attendance is good, including for disadvantaged pupils. In 2016/17, the pupils' rate of attendance increased and is above average.

- Training is regular and well received by teachers and other staff, including in relation to safeguarding. It is linked to whole-school and individual priorities. Staff are very supportive of the changes made to the school and have made a significant contribution to their implementation. Some departments have been reorganised and the timings of the school day have been altered. Leaders in the school are creative in finding and appointing new teachers, including through building better links with local universities.
- The curriculum at key stage 3 and key stage 4 meets the needs of pupils well. It has an academic emphasis but also offers successful vocational courses, such as a BTEC in sport. Subject lessons are enhanced by focus weeks, on themes such as 'national pets month', 'national anti-bullying week', 'refugee week', and 'Black history month', which most pupils enjoy greatly. A wide variety of other extra-curricular activities engages pupils and reflects their diverse talents well, including performing arts, debating competitions, religious celebrations, a weekly current affairs quiz, music showcase events, an Oxbridge application support programme, successful sports teams and individual students earning county and national sporting honours.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. These pupils make good progress during their time in school.
- Pupils at the school make good progress in the sixth form because of good teaching. Recent revisions to the sixth-form curriculum have ensured that there is a suitable range of subjects for pupils to study. Vocational subjects performed very strongly in 2017. After their time in the sixth form, students go on to succeed in suitable education or training opportunities, including at Russell Group universities.
- The school is an orderly, well-equipped and attractive learning environment. The sixth-form area, the library, and many of the classrooms have been renovated recently. A few remaining areas of the school have yet to benefit from this modernisation.
- Governors are skilled, experienced, determined and hard working. They are very ambitious for the school and, in turn, say that they are inspired by the changes taking place. Their knowledge and strong organisation, in harness with the good information they receive, mean that they are adept at holding senior leaders to account. The school complies with requirements for publishing information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils continue to improve on the progress that they make, particularly in those subject areas that do less well.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Cladingbowl
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we held meetings with you and other senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, and representatives of the governing body. We observed teaching in a variety of subjects across the school, including through joint visits to classrooms with members of the senior leadership team. We observed extra-curricular activities, including part of a rehearsal for a musical production. We spoke to pupils, including students from the sixth form, about their work and observed their conduct inside and around the school. We scrutinised a range of key documents, including information about examination results, attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. We took account of 66 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including 37 accompanying free-text comments. We also took account of 56 responses to the staff questionnaire and 55 responses to the pupil questionnaire.