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Mr Niall Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Southborough High School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2017 with Aruna Sharma, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have high expectations and the determination to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Governors are equally ambitious for the school and fully support your commitment to improvement.

A marked feature of the school is the respect and tolerance with which all members of the community treat each other. The environment is orderly and pupils consistently display positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils spoke enthusiastically to inspectors about the culture of debating in the school. As a result of regular and structured debate, pupils are highly articulate and know the importance of learning from others' views.

Through robust monitoring and implementation of bespoke strategies you have successfully reduced the gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Together with your leadership team, you have rightly prioritised the progress of the most able pupils; this remains a key part of leaders' plans for further development. Leaders remain focused on the key areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. For example, procedures used by middle leaders to ensure the quality of teaching in their areas are embedded. Nevertheless, there remains a need for some teachers to consistently plan lessons which challenge pupils, particularly the most able, to excel.

The majority of parents' views about the school are positive. They say their children

are well looked after, taught well, and that they make good progress at the school. A minority of those who responded to the online parent survey said that communication between home and school could be better to support the learning needs of their child.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough: the safety and well-being of pupils is a priority. The single central record demonstrates a rigorous recruitment process with detailed employment checks accurately recorded. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, in line with current guidance, including preventing radicalisation and extremism. Referrals to external agencies are prompt and follow-up procedures ensure that pupils' safety is a constant priority. Governors are also well versed to support the school's safeguarding culture and take their responsibilities seriously.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school, bullying is rare and when it does occur pupils are confident that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. The school's awareness of risks such as gang behaviour, substance misuse, radicalisation and mental health underpins the safeguarding culture. As a result, pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to look at the outcomes of pupils. This was because, despite improving outcomes since the last inspection, progress for pupils, particularly the most able, dipped in 2017. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the need to improve outcomes for this group of pupils.
- Work seen in books by inspectors across different year groups and a wide range of subjects showed differences in quality. For example, most-able pupils' books in a Year 10 science lesson evidenced strong progress over time and a commitment to improvement, following teacher feedback. This was not the case in all science and English classes. Where teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high, the boys respond positively. This is because the pupils have strong attitudes to learning and are keen to achieve well. Leaders are aware that teachers are not consistently planning activities that stretch pupils and give opportunities for extended writing.
- In 2016, there was a difference in the school between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of their peers. The 2017 provisional results show considerable improvement in the performance of disadvantaged pupils. Our second key line of enquiry looked at whether this was as a result of significant and sustainable actions by school leaders.
- Inspectors found that as a result of leaders' work, disadvantaged pupils receive more bespoke additional support than in the past. Accurate identification of those pupils who would benefit from close mentoring has resulted in increased progress for these pupils. Leaders are precise in their evaluation of these strategies and as a result disadvantaged pupils receive tailored support. Nevertheless,

disadvantaged pupils' books showed that teachers do not regularly plan activities that stretch these pupils' learning.

- Finally, we prioritised the sixth form as a key line of enquiry. Specifically, whether all groups of students are being supported to excel. We looked at this because, historically, progress for the most able students has not been strong across a range of A-level subjects.
- Much work has gone into structuring the provision offered on 16 to 19 study programmes. Students have a range of choice and receive effective pastoral support throughout their time in the sixth form. The academic curriculum is suitable for the students who opt to stay on and the number who complete their courses is high. However, there is too much variance in outcomes for different subjects. Where expectations are high and lessons well planned to meet students' abilities and needs, progress is strong, for example in history and religious education.
- The sixth form is an increasingly popular destination after Year 11, both for the school's own pupils and others. Students expressed appreciation of the effective guidance they receive about their future choices. The majority of students move on to appropriate university courses and some pursue apprenticeships.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and consistently apply the school assessment policy so that all pupils know how to improve their work
- teachers plan activities that challenge pupils, particularly the most able, so that they make substantial progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection inspectors: visited lessons to observe learning jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team and while in lessons they scrutinised pupils' work and discussed pupils' learning with them; listened to pupils

read who are receiving additional support through the school's catch-up programme; held meetings with leaders, staff, pupils and governors in order to explore the key lines of enquiry and the progress made by the school since the last inspection; reviewed documentation including assessment information, behaviour and attendance information, leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for development, procedures and policies including those for attendance, safeguarding and special educational needs support, and minutes of governors meetings; considered the views of the 73 parents, 41 staff and eight pupils who responded to Ofsted's online surveys.