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Mr Jonathan Culpin  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Culpin

### **Short inspection of Sawston Village College**

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with Gwyneth Gibson HMI, 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 November 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Working together with other senior leaders, you have continued to build on, and improve, the supportive and purposeful learning environment that exists. As a result, pupils behave very well and are proud of their school. They are confident and articulate young people who are keen to speak about their work.

In their discussions with inspectors, pupils said that if they had to make the decision again, Sawston Village College would always be their first choice. The overwhelming majority of parents are highly positive about the quality of education, pupils' progress and the range of skills they develop by the end of key stage 4.

The strongly committed team of governors share senior leaders' ambition and determination to continue to improve on pupils' overall strong progress. Together, you are unequivocally focused on reducing any remaining differences in outcomes across subjects and for different groups of pupils. This means that you are very well positioned on the journey to becoming an outstanding school.

You have set out the path to ongoing improvement precisely, through your self-evaluation and the school's development plans. Staff are incisive about what is working well and what needs to be changed. Your subject leaders value the support

that the senior leadership team give to them as they continue to raise standards to match those of the very best.

Many pupils join the school with above-average levels of attainment. Pupils' overall progress in GCSE examinations is above average and improving. By the end of key stage 4, many groups of pupils attain significantly better results than their peers nationally in English, mathematics, science and humanities subjects. While more pupils take GCSEs in modern foreign languages than is often the case in other schools nationally, they did not make good progress in 2016 and, in particular, in French. Outcomes were also not as strong in some GCSE option subjects, for example in art and design. This was especially so for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The provisional examination outcomes for 2017 suggest that overall progress for these groups, and in these subjects, is accelerating.

It is notable that in-school assessment information shows that pupils made good progress in German and Spanish last year but you and your team are not complacent. You know that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils consistently achieve their potential.

Working relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and mutually respectful. Pupils told inspectors that the school is a friendly place. They said that behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes is mostly very good. This view was consistent with the evidence gathered by inspectors during the short inspection. It is also reflected in the comment from a parent when they said, 'Sawston is a calm, supportive and caring school, not only for my child, but for us as parents.'

Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum. Alongside academic and vocational studies, the wider curriculum is designed to ensure that pupils develop effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. As a result, they readily take on pupil leadership roles which extend and enhance these skills. Opportunities to attend after-school clubs and interesting enrichment experiences are extensive and popular. Pupils were keen to tell inspectors that there is 'something for everyone'. High-quality performance in music is a particular strength and summed up in the words of another parent, who told inspectors, 'The music department is amazing!'

You explained how the school is also developing a national and international reputation for the quality of its work in making films. Impressively, the youth-led cinema and the film-making groups have produced work that has been shown at international film festivals. The school is rightly proud to have gained the Arts Mark Platinum award in recognition of these skills.

In September 2016, the school became one of the founding members of Anglian Learning, a multi-academy trust. Alongside other member schools, you are benefiting from the support and challenge of the trust board, as well as the economies of scale and wider opportunities to learn from and share good practice. Within the context of cohesive partnership arrangements, trust leaders are very clear in their determination to retain the unique characteristics of each individual

school. The trust is also clear in its commitment to preserve the role of local governing body in holding you and your senior leaders to account for the school's performance.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The associated staff training is regularly updated and matched well to individual needs and roles. The required staff recruitment records are suitably completed and compliant with statutory regulations.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel that the school is a safe place. They explained how they are taught how to keep safe online and showed a good understanding of the potential risks in using, for example, the internet and social media. They said that incidences of bullying at Sawston Village College were rare. Almost all pupils were confident that if bullying happened, teachers would support them by taking appropriate action. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire agreed that pupils were safe and well cared for in the school.

The school's commitment to the inclusion of all pupils is transparent and at the heart of well-established procedures. Effective action is taken to protect vulnerable young people from harm, including through strong links with local primary schools. These links help to ensure that all the necessary information is shared prior to primary pupils' transition to secondary education. Staff with specific responsibility for child protection work closely with other agencies to ensure that any required support is put in place promptly and is making a difference.

### **Inspection findings**

- In ascertaining whether the school remained good, my first key line of enquiry was to consider the impact of senior leaders' actions to secure high quality outcomes across all subjects and for different groups of pupils. This was because examination outcomes in previous years reflected some underachievement across subjects and in the progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to other, non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. This was a particular concern in French and in some of the subjects that pupils chose as options in 2016.
- Inspectors agreed that as a result of well-focused leadership of teaching, learning and assessment, subject teams are increasingly on track to achieve better outcomes for pupils in most areas that have previously underperformed. Nevertheless, you, your senior leaders and governors continue to sustain a relentless focus on securing equally strong performance across all subjects. Your development planning makes it clear that this remains a whole-school priority.
- Consequently, disadvantaged pupils now make overall progress that compares favourably with other, non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, but they do not yet make as much progress as other pupils in the school. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points.
- In considering my second line of enquiry, you told me about the steps you have

taken to ensure that all teaching is consistently strong and effective. This was because the consistency of the quality of teaching was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. To bring about further improvements, securing effective subject leadership has, quite rightly, been another key focus in your development planning over time.

- In our discussions, subject leaders made reference to their increased level of accountability for pupils' progress. In doing so, they spoke about their own extended training for the role. They explained how the observations of teaching, learning and assessment that they undertake, sometimes together with senior leaders, form part of their systematic checks on subject quality. As a result, both senior and middle leaders know what is working well and the things that need to be changed. For example, while teachers usually apply the school's assessment policy effectively and plan activities appropriately matched to pupils' abilities, you and your teams have a shared understanding that there is more to be done to ensure that this is universally the case.
- At subject and whole-school level, development plans are effective in linking improvement targets to the quality of teaching. Appropriate measures are put in place to continue to raise standards where teaching is less strong. Consequently, any differences in the quality of pupils' learning experiences are reducing. This is a positive step forward, as some inconsistent teaching quality was a concern raised by a few parents in their free-text responses during the inspection.
- I was interested to hear about the development work of the recently introduced school improvement research team. This work is positioned well to test out and share research-based good practice across the curriculum.
- In considering my third line of enquiry, staff told inspectors about the changes made to ensure that the high standard of pupils' behaviour, judged outstanding at the previous inspection, is sustained. In refreshing your behaviour management policies, you have raised the expectations of staff consistency in applying the system of rewards and sanctions. These expectations have been set out in a revised behaviour handbook and reinforced through staff training at the start of the current academic year.
- In doing so, you and your senior leaders have made your aim, to reduce further the rare incidents of low-level disruption and fixed-term exclusion, crystal clear. Changes to the pastoral system have introduced a now well-established vertical house system. Through this, pupils build effective working relationships with others from different year groups. They also benefit from regular learning conversations and one-to-one pastoral support from mentors.
- As a result, a typically calm and respectful atmosphere exists in the school. Effective strategies, including the work of the school's own inclusion unit, are continuing to ensure that the number of fixed-term exclusions are reducing.
- My final line of enquiry looked at the impact of senior leaders' actions to continue to improve attendance overall and to reduce the rate of persistent absence. This was because, while most pupils attend school regularly and so achieve well, a small group of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities had unacceptably high rates of persistent absence in 2016.

- School staff explained to inspectors how your team have taken steps to ensure that attendance patterns are carefully analysed to identify appropriate interventions. These interventions are then evaluated to ensure that they are effective. Current in-school tracking information shows that systems are working. Pupils' overall attendance is now above the national average. Nevertheless, you know that that this work needs to continue, in particular to reduce the persistent absence of a minority of disadvantaged pupils. These pupils are not achieving as well as they could because they miss too many lessons.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strong teaching practice, well established in high-performing subjects, continues to be widely shared so that the remaining inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment are eradicated
- pupils' progress in modern foreign languages and some GCSE option subjects continues to improve for all groups, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who are persistently absent reduces further.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Inspectors held meetings with senior, middle and pastoral leaders, administrative staff, representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and the chief executive officer of Anglian Learning.
- Inspectors observed pupils in lessons and looked at the work in their books. Several of the visits to lessons were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors also spoke with pupils in meetings arranged by the school and listened to a small group of Year 7 pupils reading.
- They reviewed a range of documents, including those related to governance, safeguarding, pupils' attendance and behaviour, alongside the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff, pupils and parents expressed in their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires. They also took account of parents' free-text comments received on the day of the inspection.

