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Mrs Lucy Hillyard
Denefield School
Long Lane
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Dear Mrs Hillyard

Short inspection of Denefield School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Karen Roche, Ofsted Inspector, and Mark Roessler, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide strong and determined leadership aimed at ensuring a high-quality education for all pupils, regardless of their ability or circumstances. You are tenacious in your pursuit of excellence, while balancing your drive with the well-being of staff and pupils. Therefore, staff at the school trust and respect you and the leadership team. Morale is high and everyone at the school shares your determination to provide the best for every pupil. There is a caring and stimulating ethos in the school, which enables pupils to make strong progress and achieve well. However, you and your leadership team are not complacent and you are implementing plans ambitiously to help pupils make even greater progress.

Pupils behave well at the school. They are kind and respectful towards each other and their teachers. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and they take good care of their school environment. The wide range of clubs and activities on offer are appreciated by pupils. Pupils and staff are rightly proud of the many successes of the school's sports teams in local and national competitions. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy school and this is reflected in their good levels of attendance. The attendance of most disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.

Leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely and the effect it has on the progress of pupils. As a result, leaders know the many strengths of the school, including the strong progress made by pupils in English, the humanities subjects and modern foreign languages. You also know where you can make further improvement, such

as in helping pupils, particularly lower-ability pupils, make the same strong progress in science as in other subjects. Leaders are also determined to improve the rate of progress made by boys in some subjects, which is slower than the rate of progress made by girls.

Leaders have developed meticulous systems to assess and track pupils' progress. Consequently, teachers are able to provide prompt and effective help to support pupils who are at risk of falling behind. For example, when pupils' progress in a GCSE subject causes concern, they are given appropriate individual support in lessons after school and they then quickly begin to make more rapid progress. As a result of this focused support, the progress of pupils is accelerating steadily in all year groups.

Governors know the school very well and provide strong challenge and support to you and other leaders. Everyone shares your ambition that pupils achieve their best and develop into well-rounded citizens. The community holds your inclusive school in high regard and, as a result, the number of applications for admission to the main school and the sixth-form school is increasing. Parents and carers speak highly of the school and almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All records are detailed and of a high quality. All staff and governors receive regular training on how to keep children safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. Before appointing staff, leaders carry out all the required employment checks. These are then recorded meticulously on the school's single central register.

There is a strong culture of vigilance and support to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures and practices because they receive regular training and updates.

A team of dedicated staff works with sensitivity and determination alongside parents and external agencies to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Parents say that their children feel safe in school. Pupils state that staff are approachable and that they know an adult they can turn to if they have any worries. Pupils appreciate the concern that staff members have for their welfare and well-being.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on the following lines of enquiry: how successfully leaders are tackling the areas for improvement from the previous inspection; the extent to which the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving; the extent to which boys' progress is accelerating to match the strong progress of girls; and how effectively leaders are planning for the increased numbers of pupils attending the sixth form.

- At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils make consistently strong progress in all lessons and all subjects. Since then, leaders have developed effective approaches to training and developing teachers' skills. This training helps teachers plan effectively for the needs of pupils of varying abilities. Pupils now make consistently strong progress in most subjects in the main school and the sixth form. However, leaders recognise that further improvement is possible, particularly in science, music and design technology.
- School leaders invest the pupil premium grant wisely to support the academic and personal development of disadvantaged pupils. In Year 7, disadvantaged pupils are helped to improve their reading, writing and mathematical skills. As a result, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is now more rapid. Leaders give innovative support to individuals. For example, exceptionally talented disadvantaged pupils are supported to continue their musical training at the highest level. However, there is a small group of pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable who do not attend regularly. Leaders are determined to improve the attendance of this group and monitor them closely, intervening promptly when their progress slows.
- Boys now make at least average progress in most subjects, including English, modern foreign languages and the humanities subjects. Boys make strong progress in mathematics. Effective training for teachers has focused on ways to help boys learn. As a result, leaders' current assessment information and the work inspectors saw in books and lessons show that boys now make more rapid progress. The school is rightly continuing to focus on accelerating the progress made by boys until it matches the strong progress made by girls.
- Pupils' progress in the sixth form is strong, in both applied and vocational subjects. The reputation of the sixth form in the community is rapidly improving and the numbers of applications to join have increased significantly. School leaders have researched the needs and abilities of the pupils joining the sixth form and planned a future curriculum that is flexible and challenging.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of boys accelerates further so that their attainment matches the high standards that girls achieve.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, leaders, governors and staff. They spoke to groups of pupils, formally and informally. They visited classes to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. They observed pupils at breaktime, at lunchtime and as they left school. They considered documentary evidence, including that related to safeguarding, attendance, the progress of current pupils and the work of governors. Inspectors took account of 95 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and the outcomes of a staff survey.