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Mrs Katherine Ryan  
Headteacher  
Matthew Arnold School  
Arnolds Way  
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Oxfordshire  
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Dear Mrs Ryan

### **Short inspection of Matthew Arnold School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Patrick Harty and Mary Davies, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders and governors share a precise understanding of the school's strengths and how to improve them further. Your school's motto, 'success for everyone', ensures that staff routinely reflect on pupils' readiness to learn and their targets in different subjects so that they achieve strong outcomes at GCSE and follow the most appropriate post-16 courses.

Leaders have established a culture and ethos which promote pupils' superb achievement in a calm, caring and safe environment. Relationships between pupils are strong because all are taught to respect one another. Pupils told us that the school's vertical (mixed age) tutor-group system helped them to work as a family and support one another. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were overwhelmingly positive about the inclusive nature of your school. They recognise how the staff team supports and nurtures pupils so they succeed. As a result, the vast majority of parents would recommend this school to others.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to ensure that all groups of pupils

make equally good progress by monitoring school data carefully and measuring the impact of actions put in place to support specific groups. They also asked leaders to give pupils more opportunities to discuss and check their understanding of their own progress.

You and your leadership team effectively analyse school information and track pupils' progress to identify which pupils need further support. Leaders, with governors, regularly review the impact of their actions to help pupils who have fallen behind. Governors support leaders well by appropriately challenging them on which actions are having a positive impact on pupils' well-being, progress and attendance. There is a very open relationship between your governing body and your leadership team and this promotes improvement well.

Your teaching and learning policy requires teachers to include opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning. As a result, pupils talk eloquently about the topics they are studying and share their ideas openly in lessons. Teachers expect pupils to use this learning time productively and they do. Pupils enjoy learning and their books are well looked after. Teachers ensure that all pupils are encouraged to actively reflect on, and evaluate, the progress they make over time. While the most able pupils are challenged well by this approach, it is not yet as well embedded or effective for those pupils with low prior attainment.

In 2017, GCSE outcomes were well above national averages. The vast majority of pupils make good progress. This is because of the effective leadership of teaching; the appointment of passionate subject specialists; and leaders striving to continually improve provision. Very effective leadership in English, mathematics and science ensures that pupils attain good GCSE grades and make strong progress. The majority of pupils joining your school are above the national standard and these pupils excel at school. However, some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities have not made the same levels of progress as their peers in some subject areas.

Sixth-form students achieve grades above the national figures for students with similar starting points in most of their subjects. Teachers have high expectations and the sixth-form leadership team and tutors carefully monitor students' progress, providing appropriate support to those who need additional help.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Governors routinely check that all processes and policies meet requirements and that school records are thorough and complete.

Specifically trained safeguarding staff ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff receive safeguarding training periodically throughout the year to keep up to date.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and they said that they feel safe at school. They

told us they are confident about who to go to if they have a concern. The vast majority of parents agreed that their children are well cared for and safe.

The school's work in educating pupils about the risks of drugs, alcohol and child sexual exploitation, e-safety and recognising radicalisation and extremism is given an appropriately high priority throughout the academic year.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; pupils' achievement, including that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities; the support offered to pupils with low literacy on entry; and the school's strengths in English, mathematics and science.
- You have taken action to improve the attendance of all disadvantaged pupils by using additional funding to provide extra mentoring and build positive relationships with families. This has improved the attendance of this group of pupils and is having a positive impact on their progress as a result.
- Leaders use additional funding in a variety of ways to support disadvantaged pupils. This includes the provision of different curriculum pathways to support some of these pupils improving their English and mathematics skills during key stages 3 and 4. Consequently, some disadvantaged pupils make rapid gains in key stage 3. However, more action is needed to secure stronger progress for this group of pupils in some of their key stage 4 subjects.
- Leaders set pupils challenging subject targets and expect all pupils to have positive attitudes to learning. Leaders are keen for all pupils to achieve and have identified a small group of pupils in each year who are not yet reaching their goals. Many of these pupils are disadvantaged, have SEN and/or disabilities or had low prior attainment on entry. Teachers support these groups, 'priority students', in lessons by helping them to find ways to learn better. Pupils told us that this whole-school approach was challenging them to believe in themselves and helping them to remember key pieces of information.
- The SEN coordinator identifies suitable provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Regular training provides all staff with strategies on how to support these pupils in class.
- Leaders' high expectations that all staff are also teachers of SEN require staff to plan appropriate learning activities to support these pupils well. Where this happens, these pupils make good progress. Current school assessment information and books we checked in lessons show that most of these pupils are making progress in line with their school targets and 'ready to learn' expectations. However, the progress of some of these pupils is not as consistently strong.
- A few pupils join Year 7 with low literacy skills. Dedicated curriculum time is used to develop the reading, comprehension and writing skills of these pupils so that they can access the full range of subjects. Pupils who follow this programme quickly catch up and use their skills to access the wider curriculum.

- You have a strong group of well-qualified teachers who deliver engaging lessons, challenging pupils to develop a secure knowledge and understanding of English, mathematics and science subjects. They plan interesting activities which help pupils to broaden their experiences and reinforce their understanding. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and the majority of pupils rise to the challenge.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities continues to improve and these groups make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you, your leadership team, the chair, vice-chair and other representatives of the governing body. The inspection team met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. We visited lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and members of the leadership team. We looked at the school's documentation, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and school development plan. We evaluated progress and attendance information relating to current pupils, and reviewed governors' minutes. We also checked the school's policies relating to safeguarding, the use of additional funding, including pupil premium funding, and the curriculum. We considered 147 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 84 responses to the staff questionnaire and 86 responses from pupils and students.