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Mrs Suzanne Dickinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dickinson

Short inspection of Meopham School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Ann Fearon, 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 November 2014.

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.

Since the previous inspection, pupils' progress has accelerated rapidly. Year 11 pupils' progress in their GCSE examinations in 2017 was impressive, placing the school in the top 10% of schools nationally. The school ensures that disadvantaged pupils perform as well as their peers and in 2017 their results were better than other pupils nationally. Pupils make exceptional progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and in almost all other subjects.

You have successfully embedded a culture of high ambition. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils. Pupils have a positive attitude towards their studies and they thrive in this ambitious culture. Pupils are resilient and learn well from their mistakes. Pupils show a pride in their work and are keen to improve even further.

You and your senior team have focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching. Areas of improvement in the last inspection have been addressed well. Teachers are highly motivated. They benefit from effective and diverse training

opportunities, which hone their skills. Teachers' strongly consistent practice in teaching, learning and assessment contributes to pupils' high rates of progress.

The governing body has strengthened since the last inspection. Your comprehensive reports provide them with helpful information about the progress of pupils and their well-being. Minutes show that governors ask searching questions and they regularly visit the school so they can see the evidence for themselves. The highly skilled and experienced governing body provides excellent support and challenge to school leaders.

The Swale Academies Trust supports the school very well. You work closely with other trust schools. You, your staff and governors speak highly of the network opportunities provided to share and develop good practice across the trust.

You have worked hard with parents to improve the reputation of the school in the community. Most parents are very happy with the school. As a result, the school is currently heavily over-subscribed in Years 7 and 8.

You identify precisely the school's main strengths and those areas that could be further improved. For example, you know that the humanities subjects of history and geography could be further improved to match the high standards across the rest of the school. In addition, while most-able pupils' progress is in line with other schools you are determined to ensure that they make even greater gains.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are monitored effectively. Checks on adults' suitability to work with children are carried out well.

Leaders have established a strong, open culture of safeguarding that permeates the school. Staff have regular training so that they are knowledgeable about procedures to keep their pupils safe, including from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Leaders communicate well with parents, carers and other agencies should there be concerns about a pupil. The focus on communication and keeping comprehensive records makes sure that pupils are supported and safe.

Pupils are well supported in understanding how to keep themselves safe. Pupils say they feel safe in school. Teachers are highly skilled and effective in teaching pupils about safeguarding issues. For example, teachers guide pupils' discussion well about challenging topics such as female genital mutilation, in personal, social and health education lessons.

Pupils report that bullying is rare. They say that if there is any bullying behaviour, it is dealt with sensitively and effectively by staff. Pupils say they have someone to go to should they have any safeguarding concerns.

Inspection findings

- The focus of this inspection was to investigate specific areas of the school's provision including: the progress of most-able pupils; the progress of pupils in humanities; the provision for sixth-form students; and the leadership and management of pupils' well-being.
- You have made thorough plans to identify and improve all pupils' progress. Leaders and teachers check individual pupils' progress thoroughly. As a consequence, they have an accurate picture of how well pupils are doing. Governors ensure that leaders are held to account for the progress of pupils, including those who are the most able and disadvantaged. Should there be concern about rates of progress, your staff take swift action to help pupils to overcome any barriers to their learning. As a result, pupils' progress across the school and in most subjects is yielding strong outcomes compared to national averages.
- For most-able pupils, teachers routinely provide deeper learning opportunities in lessons. The name given to describe such activities, 'stretch and challenge', is part of the day-to-day language used by pupils and staff, contributing to the ambitious culture. Most-able pupils say they relish the opportunity to tackle harder work. Pupils say that the ambitious targets they are given help them to understand what they can achieve. One pupil represented the views of others by saying, 'I'm making loads of progress' and 'We like being challenged.' Your school-wide push to improve the progress of the most able pupils is well underway and having a positive effect.
- You have identified that, in recent years, pupils' progress in history and geography has been weaker than in other subjects. You have identified that teaching, learning and assessment are not as consistently strong in humanities as in other subjects. Your plans have resulted in improvements but you are not yet satisfied that standards are high enough in these subjects. Very skilled English teachers are supporting colleagues to ensure that pupils' writing is of high quality in the humanities subjects. Pupils' work shows that they can now write well and explain their ideas in detail in history and geography. Pupils' progress is improving in humanities subjects.
- Leaders and teachers support sixth-form students well. Students have chosen courses that are appropriate for their future career aims. Leaders provide helpful advice and guidance so students are confident about post-18 choices, including higher education degree courses. Students speak very highly about their experience in the sixth form and they make good progress.
- Leaders have high expectations of behaviour. You have developed a culture of mutual respect and harmonious relationships. Pupils treat each other and their teachers with courtesy. They say, 'everyone knows everyone' and that they are well cared for. Teachers have clear guidelines about how to ensure that any concerns about pupils' well-being are acted upon and any issues are rectified. Inspectors noted that the atmosphere in the school was very calm and nurturing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in history and geography matches the very high standards achieved in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Child
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, and a group of staff. Inspectors also considered 24 responses from staff to Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- I met with the chair of governors and the chief executive of Swale Academies Trust.
- Inspectors considered 91 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across year groups and subjects. All observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work, across year groups and subjects, was carried out during learning walks. A further scrutiny of pupils' work in humanities and other subjects was undertaken. Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, and 80 questionnaire responses from pupils were taken into account.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement, and analysis of the school's performance data. Information relating to safeguarding and child protection records, external reports, and minutes of governors' meetings were also scrutinised.