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Mrs Sarah Gilraine
Executive Headteacher
The Fountains High School
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Dear Mrs Gilraine

Short inspection of The Fountains High School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2018 with Sarah Ashley, 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 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.

The school is well led and managed and leaders have a clear evaluation of its strengths and areas for development. You have used this shared understanding to improve the quality of education that you provide effectively. Through informed action and whole-staff commitment to doing what is best for the pupils, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance are all improving. The curriculum has been enriched and the post-16 provision is of the highest quality.

Leaders have taken effective action to address the areas of improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. All staff follow the school's assessment policy and set pupils targets to help them identify clearly what they have learned and how they can improve their work. Pupils often work with staff to set their own targets and track their progress. However, some targets set by staff are not clear enough to help pupils make immediate progress.

Pupils are given regular opportunities to take charge of their own learning through investigations and problem-solving. For example, when considering the best resources to use to measure different-sized objects and areas. Older pupils also develop these skills through enterprise and micro-business projects that they enjoy away from the school site.

Functional skills are firmly embedded in the post-16 curriculum. The way that reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills are linked to everyday life is also developing in key stages 3 and 4. There is an agreed approach to the teaching of reading and pupils are given opportunities to read in different situations. The use of 'reading buddies' and the wide range of reading materials that are available to pupils is helping to nurture a love of reading. As a result, pupils are making better progress in reading than in the past.

Most pupils make strong progress across the curriculum and leave key stage 4 and 5 with a range of appropriate skills and qualifications. However, leaders have correctly identified the need to improve further the quality of writing, particularly in key stage 3, as an area for development.

The current assessment system is accurate and helps to track progress against aspirational targets. However, it does not fully reflect national developments or help all staff to offer appropriate challenge to enhance pupils' core skills from their different starting points. Leaders are aware that they need to refine their assessment process to support this. Consequently, they have developed, but not yet introduced, a new system for tracking pupils' progress.

The vast majority of pupils behave well and those who find it more challenging to manage their own behaviour are helped to do so. Staff are well-trained and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They use positive strategies to resolve situations and behaviour incidents are analysed carefully to inform further action. As a result, inappropriate behaviour is effectively managed and declining.

Most pupils attend regularly but personal circumstances and illness impact on the attendance of some pupils. However, despite the school's attempts to address this, a few pupils are absent too often when they could be in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. This aspect of the school's work is well led and there is a strong culture for keeping children safe throughout the school.

All staff are well trained and kept up to date about safeguarding issues. Leaders and staff have a very clear understanding of their responsibilities and they consciously consider the welfare of pupils in all that they do.

Processes for reporting concerns are clear and known by staff. Referrals are timely and appropriate action is taken if required. Leaders follow up concerns

thoroughly.

The school has a very effective early help offer through its support team and enhanced provision. Records are stored securely and information is used well to help pupils stay safe. The school's single central record is compliant and procedures to recruit select and check staff are appropriate.

Pupils, staff, parents and carers believe that pupils are safe and there are clear procedures in the school to keep pupils safe. The site is secure and pupils are taught to stay safe in an appropriate way. For example, they learn about personal safety and how to stay safe when using the internet. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were very clear about the procedures that the school have in place to help them stay safe online.

Pupils raised no concerns about bullying during the inspection. However, they are confident that staff would deal quickly and effectively with any unpleasant behaviour if it occurred.

Inspection findings

- There is some very high-quality teaching in the school. Where teaching is most effective activities are thoughtfully planned to help pupils make rapid progress from their different starting points. As staff think carefully about the purpose of these activities, there is a clear focus on developing core skills in a range of situations. These learning opportunities are deliberately designed to help the pupils lead successful lives outside of school.
- Staff work well together and teaching assistants are appropriately deployed. Peer mentoring and coaching is used effectively, alongside other training opportunities, to help staff develop their practice. Although all teaching is not yet consistently of the highest standard, the overall quality is continuing to improve.
- Where teaching is less strong, staff do not use assessment information as well to challenge pupils to develop their core skills more rapidly. The purpose of the learning is not always clear and activities do not move on at an appropriate pace. Occasionally, the feedback that a small number of staff gives to pupils does not provide them with the precise next steps to improve their learning. Leaders believe that the new assessment system will help staff to do this more consistently.
- Most pupils make rapid progress across the curriculum. In 2017, key stage 4 pupils achieved a range of appropriate qualifications, including GCSEs. The outcomes in science were particularly strong.
- Attendance has improved since the time of the last inspection and it is getting closer to the national average for all secondary schools. Most pupils attend well but a few pupils are absent too often.
- Post-16 provision is excellent. Teaching is of a very high quality and the development of functional skills is firmly embedded within the curriculum.

Students are consistently given opportunities to apply and develop their skills in mathematics, reading, writing and communication in a range of situations. For example, during the inspection, students were using their communication skills to prepare for interviews, applying their mathematical skills to design a patio and developing their reading skills by following a recipe.

- Post-16 students are prepared effectively for adulthood through college link courses and a well-designed and flexible curriculum. Students learn about healthy lifestyles, personal hygiene, sex and relationships, personal safety, emotional well-being, fundamental British values and online safety. Many students have benefited from appropriate travel training and some have passed their driving theory and practical tests.
- Work-related learning is also a core part of the post-16 curriculum. All students have the opportunity to take part in tailored work experience programmes. Many work in local businesses run by the school and a few are developing their skills through supported internships.
- Outcomes for post-16 students are strong. They gain a range of qualifications, including functional skills in English and mathematics at the appropriate level. Almost all move onto meaningful and sustained destinations when they leave the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in teaching, learning and assessment are firmly embedded by ensuring that:
 - the new assessment system is introduced, applied consistently and refined as required
 - all staff use the assessment information that is available to them to plan activities that allow pupils to make rapid progress from their different starting points
 - the consistently high-quality development of functional skills, particularly in reading, writing and communication, that takes place in the post-16 provision is applied in key stages 3 and 4
 - all staff are clear about the purpose of activities and move learning on at the appropriate pace
 - effective feedback gives pupils clear next steps on how to improve their work.
- continued, effective action is taken to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, head of school, other leaders and staff. Eighteen responses to the staff questionnaire were also considered.
- The lead inspector spoke to four governors and had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer linked to the school.
- Short visits were made to most classrooms with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally and behaviour was observed at the start of the day, in lessons and during social time.
- Fourteen responses and five free-text comments on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered. An inspector also spoke to parents at the start of the day.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and the lead inspector looked at published information on the school's website.