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Mrs Kate Smith
Headteacher
Monk's Walk School
Knightsfield
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Monk's Walk School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with Jason Howard, HMI and Simon Webb, 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 passionate leadership that is guided by your desire to do 'what is right' by the pupils who attend your school. You are supported by a well-respected and effective senior leadership team that ensures that pupils receive a broad and rich quality of education, both inside the classroom and through the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that are available to them. You are rightly proud of your school's full orchestra that is made up of pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. You are committed to supporting all pupils, whatever their needs, and you work tirelessly to ensure that pupils receive the appropriate support to help them succeed at school.

Pupils are well behaved and have positive attitudes to learning. They are grateful for the high-quality support that they receive from adults in the school. Pupils believe that expectations of their behaviour and attitudes to learning are continuing to rise and your own records show continued improvements. Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is high. Parents are highly positive about your leadership and of the opportunities that the school offers their children.

You have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders provide extensive support to colleagues but they also have high expectations and do not shy away from making difficult decisions. As a consequence, the quality of leadership and teaching has improved since your previous inspection. Your relentless focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been central to your development planning over recent years and there have been significant improvements in the overall academic progress of this group of pupils.

Governors continue to provide you with support and offer robust accountability. They know the school well, are passionate about its role within the community and are clear about what the school needs to do to improve further. You, leaders and governors are in agreement over the need to ensure that the recent changes to the sixth form result in greater progress across all A level subjects. You also acknowledge the need to build upon the improvements in the overall progress of disadvantaged pupils with a more specific focus on the progress, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged boys.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Governors have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and they are highly effective in carrying them out. Leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff and these records are scrutinised on a regular basis by a nominated member of the governing body. Staff are well trained and they know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk. Staff understand the school's systems for reporting concerns and they stated that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept and any child protection referrals are monitored robustly.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe through assemblies, tutorial sessions and personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons that cover topics such as e-safety and mental health awareness. Pupils value the high levels of staff supervision throughout the school day. Leaders' approaches to early intervention for vulnerable pupils, through the support provided by 'Mindful Mentors', is a particular strength. The vast majority of parents and carers said that their children are happy and well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- We pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. My first question related to the extent to which the quality of teaching is improving and its impact on pupils' progress. Leaders have improved the quality of teaching since the previous inspection through a combination of effective training, support to help teachers to improve, increased expectations and high-quality recruitment. Teachers' strengths and weaknesses

are now evaluated using a wider range of evidence and training is tailored to teachers' individual needs. New and recently qualified teachers particularly value the professional development opportunities open to them, such as the bursary scheme, which allows them to work alongside leaders in order to address key school priorities. As a result of close monitoring and support, leaders accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching across the school. They demonstrate impact when helping teachers improve their practice.

- As a result of leaders' actions, the overall progress of pupils currently in the school is good and improving. Where progress is particularly strong it is as a result of teachers' deep subject knowledge, which they use to check pupils' understanding, clarify their misconceptions and challenge their thinking. Positive relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils are confident to take risks, while teachers' planning is effective in taking into account pupils' different starting points.
- Pupils' improving progress over time is supported by leaders' records of pupils' recent assessments. Overall progress and attainment of pupils currently in the school are good and improving. However, you are aware that the impact of their actions has been greater in some subject areas than others and you have plans in place to address this, for example in drama, religious education and information and communications technology.
- A second line of enquiry related to how successfully leaders have responded to students' below-average A level progress of the previous three years. In response to this issue, leaders have undertaken a thorough review of sixth-form provision in order to ensure that students' progress improves rapidly.
- Students now receive more appropriate advice and guidance to ensure that they undertake the most appropriate courses and there are a range of strategies in place to support students throughout their studies. Tutor-group sizes have been reduced to ensure that students receive high-quality support. Academic review days now enable students to receive additional advice and guidance. Students are incredibly grateful for the support that they receive. One student commented, 'They make every effort to help everyone.'
- Leaders and teachers' higher expectations of what sixth-form students are capable of achieving are evident through observations of lessons and discussions with students. In lessons, students are challenged and provided with high-quality guidance from their teachers. Assessment is more regular and it is moderated robustly, often through links with other local schools. As a consequence, the overall progress of current students is improving rapidly, although there is still some variation in the progress being made in individual subject areas, such as photography, media and business studies.
- Finally, we wanted to check the impact of leaders' strategies to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils upon pupils currently in the school. You are passionate about your responsibility to ensure that disadvantaged pupils succeed in your school and between 2016 and 2017 the overall progress of this group of pupils increased significantly.
- You have developed a wide range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils, including mentoring, rewards, additional support and access to extra-curricular

activities. As a consequence, the overall progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved rapidly. Your own analysis suggests that these recent improvements are secure and this is supported by evidence seen in visits to lessons. Although the overall progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve, you are committed to ensuring that the progress, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged boys catches up with that of disadvantaged girls.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent changes made to the sixth form are embedded, so that pupils' progress accelerates and their examination outcomes improve
- they reduce the differences in progress, absence and exclusions between disadvantaged boys and all pupils nationally.

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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Gee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, leaders, other school staff, trustees (including a phone call with the chair of trustees) and groups of pupils. Together with you and other leaders, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. We also considered the 175 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire from parents.