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23 February 2018

Ms Wendy Walters
Principal
Chatham Grammar School for Girls
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Dear Ms Walters

Short inspection of Chatham Grammar School for Girls

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with Steve Baker, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In the light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You took up post in September 2017 when the school officially joined the University of Kent Academies Trust (UKAT). The formation of the multi-academy trust, including addressing the school's significant financial deficit, had taken much longer than expected. An interim principal, appointed by the previous governing body, held the fort in 2016/17.

The executive principal of the trust wrote to your parents and noted that, 'currently pupils' achievement at CGSG [Chatham Grammar School for Girls] is far too low ... results could be much better'. This was true. The school's reputation and the number of parents choosing it had also declined. Even so, it has not been straightforward for you to win over the hearts and minds of all present and future pupils, students, staff and parents and carers.

During your four months in post, you have overseen a period of great change at the school. However, you acknowledge that some new developments are not yet fully bedded in.

A member of staff observed, 'We were stuck in our ways and needed a fresh start'. All governors, senior leaders and several staff left at the end of 2016/17. You, your leadership team and UKAT senior leaders have brought a breadth of experience and

expertise which has generated many improvements.

Increasingly, parents appreciate that their children continue to be very happy at school and at the same time are also making much better academic progress.

Parents' views of the school depend on which year their daughter is in. Those with older pupils and students are most concerned about staff turnover in the past and the large number of changes this year. Others are predominantly happy and feel the pastoral care is sensitive within 'the lovely atmosphere' and 'caring ethos'. Sixth-form students have found the changes unsettling, but a group of them confirmed that they like the atmosphere in the school and the strong community feeling.

Girls' behaviour around the school is thoughtful and calm; their concentration and application in lessons are excellent. They acknowledge that changes in staff have been upsetting but are glad that fewer lessons are taught by replacement teachers. Pupils we met during the inspection were reflective and knew the reasons for some of the changes, even if they did not like them. Pupils were confident that they get on well together and gave convincing examples of how they respect diversity.

This academic year, leaders have made changes that are improving pupils' day-to-day experiences while at school. They have made a convincing start on eradicating poor teaching and departmental leadership. The latter was an issue which also emerged from the school's previous inspection. In the past, results in modern foreign languages, for example, looked reasonable but pupils had in fact made far too little progress from their starting points. A few middle leaders still do not evaluate and reflect on whether the teaching in the departments they lead is good enough. In particular, they do not always consider whether pupils are being given hard enough work.

Your trustees are determined to see CGSG flourish and benefit from all that Kent University offers in terms of strong governance, highly qualified academic and support staff, resources, economies of scale, access to a wider curriculum and business links across Medway and beyond. Evidence suggests that the trust is already adding value, building momentum and developing creativity and innovation in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures were tightened up during the first term in UKAT. Senior leaders now have responsibility for safeguarding and child protection, special educational needs, and pastoral care and well-being. Early in 2018, parents received clear information about which staff member they should contact if they needed to.

Safeguarding training is rigorous and thorough so that all teachers and support staff are alert to, for example, the 'Prevent' duty. They understand their responsibility to report immediately any concerns they might identify about a pupil or student. In terms of pupils' well-being, pupils, students and parents can access a counselling service through trust links. A mindfulness programme reflects leaders' promotion of pupils' mental health; some pupils commented on how relevant they find the course.

The school's website has many useful links for pupils, students and parents to read about e-safety and social media issues. These are also covered in personal, social, health education lessons and parents' evenings. Practically all pupils and students said that they felt safe in school all the time.

Inspection findings

- You and senior leaders were not surprised by the areas I proposed to explore during the inspection. My colleague and I were keen to identify reasons for the variation in subject outcomes in 2016 and 2017 and the lack of high GCSE and A-level grades. We were also interested to explore what had been achieved since the school joined UKAT. You know exactly where pupils' and students' progress has been, or continues to be, above or below average. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching and standards is sharp and accurate.
- Mathematics is popular and taught with pace and clear explanations which generate above average progress. As in several other subjects, teachers used a variety of effective approaches to check pupils' understanding quickly. In several classes visited during the inspection, girls worked extremely well together in pairs or groups, sharing ideas and helping each other.
- Subjects where pupils' results have not been good enough in recent years include English literature, combined sciences (highlighted for improvement in the previous inspection), modern foreign languages and several others where progress was below the national average for pupils with similar starting points.
- You observed that 'teachers teach to the middle'. This was evident by the fact that the most able pupils consistently made less progress in recent years than those with lower starting points. A similar pattern of around-average progress in recent years emerges in the sixth form. There is a much lower proportion of high grades than seen in national figures, which include selective and non-selective schools.
- A number of teachers have joined the school in the last calendar year. They, and several others, have enthusiastically responded to the high-quality training you have organised. Among these middle leaders, we sensed an overall step forward in the quality of teaching and spoke to several confident and determined middle leaders. Some of them have identified where gaps in pupils' knowledge or experience, such as from no field work in geography in the past, were holding back the fast progress they wanted. However, not all middle leaders have high enough expectations of what the pupils can achieve.
- From what we saw and discussed, my colleague and I agreed with you that pupils are making better progress this year and that results should improve. We also agreed with your analysis that there is further work to be done for examination outcomes to represent the achievement expected of a selective school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they persevere with the successful actions they have introduced to encourage the highest aspirations in staff, pupils and students and to develop teachers' skills
- teachers plan stimulating work which challenges pupils, especially the most able, so that they all make consistently strong progress and achieve more high GCSE and A-level grades
- subject leaders, especially in modern foreign languages, improve the quality of teaching and the standards that pupils and students achieve in the subjects they manage.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I held meetings with you and your assistant principals, the UKAT executive principal and two other trust principals. Your assistant principals include the designated safeguarding lead and the special educational needs coordinator. I spoke to the chair of trustees by telephone and met one trustee in school. I also spoke by telephone to an external education consultant who has been supporting the school's work.

Inspectors talked to pupils and students informally around the school and in lessons and held meetings with representatives of Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form 'student voice'. With you, a member of the trust or an assistant principal, we visited lessons in a range of classes and subjects. We scrutinised documents related to safeguarding (exploring a couple of case studies) and your self-evaluation and information on pupils' current progress.

Inspectors took into account questionnaire responses by 30 staff, 97 pupils and students and 80 parents; most of these parents wrote free-text comments.