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8 March 2018

Mr Simon Harrison
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Dear Mr Harrison

Short inspection of Crofton School

Following my visit to the school on 22 February 2018 with Krista Dawkins and Charles Joseph, 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

This school continues to be good

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Now into your second year in post, it is clear that you have steered the school forward thoughtfully and perceptively, ably supported by your experienced deputy headteacher. You have taken the right steps towards your goal of making the school 'exceptional'. You have gained the staff's support and boosted their morale. Over 90% of teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaire, and practically all of them agreed that they feel proud to work at the school, enjoy working there and that it is well led and managed.

Pupils sense the staff's mood, which contributes to an atmosphere in which learning is enjoyable and progress can flourish. The well-established school motto, 'kindness, ambition and diligence' is valued by pupils, and consideration of these attributes is part of school life. In their questionnaire responses pupils made it clear that the school promotes and encourages them 'to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat people equally'. Some pupils were unfamiliar with the term 'British values' though these are certainly included in personal development lessons. Some pupils also felt they would like to know more about personal finance, which pupils feel they need to know more about – taxes, for example and, optimistically, mortgages.

Personal development and religious education lessons, assemblies and tutor sessions cover a wide range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Pupils

regularly discuss the news and sensitive topics such as or euthanasia or genetic engineering. Supporting the school's affiliation to the charity, Stonewall, a group of Year 11 pupils prepared an assembly on different relationships and lifestyles. Their reflections on delivering some 'awkward content' were mature and thoughtful. Several parents noted how quickly you responded when you became aware of bullying that lingered on from the past; other parents still have concerns about it. You are determined to eliminate any form of bullying, particularly 'verbal unkindness and racist comments'. All the (randomly chosen) pupils to whom inspectors spoke during the inspection felt that bullying was rare. They were confident that any incidents were taken seriously, 'managed well' and referred to effective anti-bullying ambassadors.

You are not concerned that the low number of internal and external exclusions has increased slightly as you are determined to establish the highest standards of behaviour and learning. During the inspection there was no low-level disruption but a very small number of pupils' concentration waned towards the end of a few lessons visited.

Pupils referred to 'some lovely teachers', saying how glad they were that they had chosen the school, and that there was greater cohesion and more respect between year groups. Year 7 pupils and parents described the excellent primary-to-secondary school arrangements. Pupils were polite and welcoming to inspectors. They are confident and articulate, and more than happy to share their thoughts, particularly about school uniform, for example!

An issue in the previous inspection report was the need to extend pupils' understanding of how to improve their work. Pupils receive much useful and practical guidance, especially when teachers give them one-to-one verbal advice during lessons. The quality of teachers' written comments varies but mostly pupils are clear about what they could do to strengthen their written work.

A middle leader commented that you have brought a welcome shift to teaching and learning by blending praise with constructive, practical advice. Making short visits to a range of subjects and all year groups, inspectors saw several lessons where pupils were working enthusiastically because teachers were:

- clearly enjoying sharing their expert subject knowledge with pupils
- igniting pupils' curiosity so they asked thoughtful questions and deepened their understanding
- providing crystal clear explanations and checking understanding as learning progressed
- identifying weaknesses and dealing with misconceptions
- using well-presented, stimulating and interesting resources.

It is clear that you keep governors fully informed about school life and value their input when discussing your plans. They are equally pleased that you want them to ask you challenging questions. They appreciate that they now have more contact

with staff. They bring a wealth of relevant experience and expertise to their roles and are right to feel confident that the school is moving in the right direction.

Safeguarding is effective

Leaders respond fast to all safeguarding issues. Pastoral staff have strong ties with the local authority to follow up, for example, the school's weekly meetings about persistent absentees and/or missing children. A pupil commented that, 'It's good we have several safeguarding leads.' It is also true that leaders do not shy away from contacting the police and other external agencies when necessary.

The local authority's strong support for vulnerable pupils and children looked after complements the school's sensitive oversight of these pupils' personal safety and learning needs. Similarly, the attention to detail for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, whether part of the Croft (for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder) or not, is extremely thorough. Several parents wrote compliments about how well their children's confidence had blossomed at the school. The highest positive responses in all the questionnaires were related to statements about pupils feeling safe. They experience many sessions on e-safety and social media. Links to relevant information are displayed clearly on the school's website.

Inspection findings

- In your analysis of recent GCSE results, you refer to the difference in progress 'remaining significant' between boys and girls, and between disadvantaged pupils and others. These were two of the groups whose progress inspectors wanted to consider. You have introduced some imaginative and effective ways of diminishing the gender gap, but during the day it became clear that some disadvantaged pupils are still not achieving as well as others.
- In 2017, the percentage of Year 11 disadvantaged pupils attaining a strong (grade 5) pass in both English and mathematics was well below other pupils in the school and nationally. In recent years the same has been true for the progress disadvantaged pupils made from Year 7 to the end of Year 11.
- Additional funds for disadvantaged pupils' pastoral needs are allocated sensitively. Governors and leaders acknowledge, however, that they have not thoroughly evaluated whether these funds have been spent as well as possible to generate rapid progress.
- The 2017 GCSE results revealed an increasing number of subjects where pupils attained above-average results. However, in the majority of subjects pupils had not made more than average progress over time, regardless of the standard they reached at the end of primary school.
- All pupils who took three separate science GCSEs attained well above the national percentage of A* to A grades. Those taking the combined science subjects did not make such strong progress. A well-above-average proportion of pupils attained a standard (grade 4) pass in mathematics, but more pupils had the potential to achieve the high grades (7 to 9 or A* to A) in this and several other

subjects.

- A few parents feel that pupils' progress speeds up in Years 10 and 11. One referred to a child's academic needs being, 'fully met in the upper school but taught at the majority level before'. You have also reflected that pupils must tackle more challenging work from Year 7. Middle leaders and teachers have the expertise and determination to make this happen.
- All teachers respond enthusiastically to the professional development now arranged by senior leaders. Links with primary schools help staff to appreciate the depth of skills and knowledge that pupils acquire in primary schools. In practical subjects, more theory is being included in Years 7 to 9. Progress in relatively weaker subjects such as music, physical education and technology subjects has recently moved into a higher gear. This follows developments to middle leadership and/or extra senior leader input which you have put in place.
- The quality of learning and pastoral support offered to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those attending the Croft, is a strength of the school. These pupils and many others benefit from the help given by dedicated and experienced teaching assistants. They are well trained in different special learning needs and several of them hold degrees in relevant subjects.
- We also discussed curriculum changes you have in mind, such as making it possible for pupils to study both German and French for GCSE. You are keen to continue the wide range of extra-curricular activities and creative subjects, with photography planned for the future. Pupils' health and well-being has a high priority, and participation in physical education is encouraged. The introduction of yoga has been welcomed and enjoyed. There are numerous trips and visits, including one by the mathematics department to Greece to reflect on Pythagoras and the golden ratio of the Parthenon!

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the exploration and sharing of best practice in teaching is extended to develop more rapid learning and progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9, so that more pupils attain the high GCSE grades
- the allocation of additional funds for disadvantaged pupils is monitored and analysed each term to check it is generating the best possible progress for these pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleagues and I held meetings with you, several members of the senior leadership team, including the designated safeguarding leads, middle leaders, and the special educational needs coordinator and Croft leader. I met the chair, vice-chair and three other governors, and the local authority school improvement manager for Fareham and Gosport who shared some reports she had written following previous visits.

Inspectors talked to pupils informally around the school and in lessons and held meetings with pupils in Years 7, 9 and 11. With you or a member of the senior leadership team we visited a range of classes. We scrutinised documents related to current progress, attendance, behaviour, and safeguarding records (following through examples of case studies).

Inspectors took into account questionnaire responses by 104 staff, 278 pupils and students and 104 parents. A similar number of parents completed the free-text option with about half of them writing detailed comments.