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Mr David Ramsden
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ramsden

Short inspection of Little Heath School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018 with Anne Cullum, Ofsted Inspector, and Beverley Murtagh, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with governors and staff, you and your leadership team are ambitious and passionate about improving the quality of provision for all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. As one parent commented, 'Teachers all seem genuinely interested in what is best for my child.'

You, together with governors and the senior leadership team, have an accurate and in-depth understanding of the school and use this to identify strengths and priorities well. This has enabled you and your senior leadership team to target resources and raise the standard of teaching and learning across the school. You usefully obtain external validation of the quality of your work from your school improvement advisor and through working with other local schools. You provide energy, vision and clear leadership which is recognised and highly valued by pupils, staff and parents. Another parent remarked: 'Little Heath School is excellent. I have nothing but praise for its staff and Mr Ramsden. My boys have thoroughly enjoyed their time there and both have thrived and excelled in their learning.'

Leaders and governors have ensured that the school has continued to focus on the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. A school-wide approach to target-setting and providing feedback has been introduced. This has helped pupils to develop a greater awareness of their current progress and how to improve their work across the curriculum. Most pupils know their targets. Their work in their

books demonstrates that they make good progress over time, and particularly strong progress in some areas such as history and English.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is well led and managed. Recently, senior leaders have ensured that teachers are provided with better information about individual pupil's learning needs. Making use of this, most teachers plan engaging learning activities suitably pitched towards meeting the needs of the different pupils in their class. Many teachers are very effective at using questioning to encourage deeper thinking and ensure a swift pace of learning. Leaders are aware that in a minority of lessons teachers offer less suitable levels of challenge and the pace of learning is slower. Effective systems are in place to support these teachers to improve their practice.

The large majority of parents responding to Parent View recognised and praised the school, and many were particularly appreciative of the high-quality pastoral care, inclusive ethos and rich curriculum that the school offers. However, a small minority expressed concerns in relation to behaviour and some teaching. Leaders and governors are rightly prioritising taking action to ensure that all teaching matches that of the best in the school. Morale is high and staff recognise that the school is improving. There is a sense of pride in Little Heath School that is shared between staff, governors and pupils. Pupils and sixth formers confidently welcome visitors, are proud to share their work, and enjoy working with their teachers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the school has robust procedures, well-understood systems to manage safeguarding requirements and a culture of vigilance. All staff have appropriate and up-to-date training so that they can spot and deal with any problems quickly. You are proactive, liaising with external agencies, and challenging where necessary, to ensure that timely and appropriate support is sourced to support vulnerable pupils. Leaders agree that minor refinements need to be made to enhance some aspects of record-keeping.

Pupils report that they know how to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet. Pupils told me that they know whom to go to should they have any concerns, and that they trust staff to resolve them. The work of the inclusion department is a strength of the school. Leaders ensure that pastoral and teaching staff work closely together to ensure that effective bespoke support is provided for vulnerable pupils and those who need to catch up.

Inspection findings

- During this visit, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements, inspectors focused on specific aspects of the school's provision, including:
 - how effectively outcomes have improved by the end of key stage 4, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have low prior attainment
 - how well leaders have ensured consistently good teaching, learning and

assessment across the curriculum

- how effective leaders' strategies are for improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
 - students' achievement in the sixth form.
- In 2016, by the end of Year 11, pupils had made below-average progress in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils at this time was particularly weak. This is no longer the case. Overall outcomes improved in 2017, progress was in line with national figures, and the differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers diminished.
 - Noteworthy improvements have been made, particularly in the planning and provision for disadvantaged pupils. Currently all pupils, including the disadvantaged, are making much stronger progress. There is more to be done, however, to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally.
 - Strong leadership by the head of inclusion, including good liaison with feeder primary schools and parents and carers, ensures very effective provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders are passionate about wanting the best for every pupil, and relationships between staff and pupils are strong. As a result, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress in school. Many parents responding to Parent View were particularly appreciative of the extra support that staff willingly give.
 - Overall, pupils' attendance is in line with the national average and improving slightly. You recognise that some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, had poor attendance rates in the past. Leaders and the school's recently recruited attendance officer are rightly focused on prioritising further improvements in this area. They have worked closely with families and outside agencies to support significant gains in attendance for individual pupils. However, there is more to be done to embed this work and improve the attendance of these groups to be in line with their peers.
 - Leaders have delivered regular training for teachers focused on improving assessment and sharing more useful progress information about each pupil. Aspirational targets have helped teachers and pupils to have higher expectations. Consequently, standards of teaching have risen across the school. Visits to lessons and checks of pupils' work demonstrate that across the curriculum there are examples of pupils responding well to teachers' feedback to refine, edit and improve their work.
 - Although the overall quality of teaching has significantly improved, there are still inconsistencies in a minority of lessons across most subject areas. Some pupils and parents expressed frustration at this. Subject leaders are not adept enough at using progress information and monitoring systems to ensure that teaching is consistently strong across their departments.
 - In 2016, sixth formers made progress in their academic courses in line with or

above national figures, but progress in applied general courses was poor. Leaders' review of the curriculum, and focus on the quality of teaching and learning, significantly improved outcomes in 2017. Current learners in the sixth form feel well supported by their teachers and particularly value the support that they give. These good relationships, coupled with leaders' effective monitoring and mentorship, support students to make good progress in their chosen courses.

- Leaders are aware that more could be done to provide students with a wider range of enrichment activities and to undertake leadership roles. This would support students to develop a wider range of skills relevant to their future study or employment. In addition, systems to monitor and track attendance in the sixth form need to be enhanced.

Next steps for the school

Senior leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders hold teachers to account to ensure that consistently high expectations, pace and challenge are maintained throughout their subject areas
- a broader range of enrichment experiences and leadership opportunities improves outcomes in the sixth form
- refinements to some record-keeping, and further improvements in attendance, improve outcomes and eliminate the gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 23 lessons and three tutor times and looked at learning. Many of these visits were made jointly with leaders. We spoke with pupils in lessons and looked at a range of their work as well as meeting with pupils and sixth formers both formally and informally. Meetings were held with yourself, senior leaders and two governors, and a telephone call was made to a consultant who acts as the school improvement adviser.

Documentary evidence, including policies, strategic planning documents and analyses of pupils' achievements, was evaluated. During the course of the inspection I considered 111 responses to the online Parent View survey, 120 replies

to a pupil questionnaire and 51 responses to a staff questionnaire. Inspectors also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and studied reports to the governing body.