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Mr George Stollery
Principal
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Dear Mr Stollery

Short inspection of Hurstmere School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018 with Olivia Cole, 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 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement, which I advise the school to address. In 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 are a determined advocate for boys' education, aiming to develop their confidence to 'aspire to academic excellence and enjoy school'. You acknowledge that there is some way to go to realise this ambition for all pupils across a range of subjects. The feedback from the Ofsted staff questionnaire suggests that the large majority of the staff who responded share your high expectations for the pupils. Pupils' progress in English, and in mathematics in particular, compare favourably with that of all pupils nationally. In 2017, attainment in both GCSE English and mathematics was above the national average for all pupils. The progress of boys at the school compares positively with that of boys nationally. However, pupils' progress and attainment overall remain below national averages for all pupils.

The previous inspection report identified the need to provide greater challenge for the most able pupils and action has been taken to respond to this. This was a key line of inquiry for this inspection and remains a priority for the school. On the day of the inspection, pupils' behaviour was generally good, although incidents of low-level disruption occurred in some classes with lower-attaining pupils. Staff, pupils and families who responded to the Ofsted surveys agreed that behaviour in the school is generally good. You and your leaders are working to improve this. Rates of exclusion are well below national averages. Pupils'

attendance overall is above the national average and leaders have put systems in place to ensure that any absence is followed up. You and your team are working hard to ensure that the progress of some disadvantaged pupils is not hampered by their higher rates of absence.

The overwhelming majority of those who responded to the Ofsted surveys expressed confidence in the leadership of the school. Parents and carers are grateful for the care shown for their children, and agree that 'staff are friendly, approachable and helpful' and that the process of transition into secondary school is well managed. The school is clearly a popular choice for families as it is oversubscribed and a larger number of pupils with high prior attainment are now joining the school. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to respond fully to the opportunities and challenges that this more comprehensive intake brings.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust, fit for purpose, and records are suitably detailed. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school. They said that staff are approachable if there is something that troubles them or that they need to share. You, together with your staff and governors, ensure that the safety and well-being of pupils is a priority. Staff follow the school's systems and processes carefully to support pupils' welfare.

Staff and governors are clear about their roles, and work effectively with parents and external agencies to safeguard pupils. Staff have received appropriate information and training covering all the statutory guidance.

Inspection findings

- First, we agreed to test the impact of leaders' actions to improve pupils' progress in science, which has lagged behind other subjects, including mathematics. Pupils' progress in science was well below the national average in both 2016 and 2017.
- Visits to science lessons confirmed that effective teaching is starting to bring about improved progress for pupils. This was particularly the case in the higher-attaining sets where pupils were engaged and attentive, demonstrating an obvious desire to learn. However, the new procedures introduced to support the planning of science teaching and to assess pupils' progress are not yet used consistently well enough. They have had less impact on the progress of lower-attaining pupils, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Lower-attaining pupils in key stage 4 are provided with fewer opportunities to carry out experiments than their higher-attaining peers. This puts them at a disadvantage and has a negative impact on their progress.
- The school's assessment information suggests that, overall, progress in science in 2018 is likely to be similar to that of 2017. Leaders recognise that work on this must continue and are employing strategies which have proven

successful in both English and mathematics.

- Second, we agreed to explore the impact of actions to further improve the progress of the most able pupils. Although, in 2017, those pupils made above average progress in mathematics, it was not the case in other subjects.
- The progress of the most able pupils is a central part of the school development plan. Staff have welcomed improvement strategies, including the development of teachers' practice through partnerships with local schools.
- You and your leaders have rightly acknowledged the need for more effective tracking of pupils' progress through a more consistent approach to assessment. Where assessment information was well used and the most able pupils were challenged with high but realistic targets, they made good progress. However, where strategies were not implemented consistently, pupils' progress was slower.
- Although senior leaders rightly focus on the effectiveness and consistency of teaching, they have also put in place a range of enrichment and intervention strategies for the most able pupils. These are planned to deepen pupils' knowledge and expand their horizons. For example, they have taken part in visits to higher education institutions and events at neighbouring selective schools, such as 'master classes'. Pupils speak positively about such experiences and a number expressed high aspirations for their futures.
- Finally, we agreed to evaluate how leaders have developed the curriculum to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This is because disadvantaged pupils' progress in a number of subjects at the end of key stage 4 was significantly below that of pupils nationally in 2017.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is significantly below the national average. Staff know the pupils well. This means that pupils develop strong relationships with key members of staff, which in turn supports their well-being.
- Leaders have taken decisive action to improve the experience for disadvantaged pupils in subjects where progress was disappointing in 2017. Current progress information in those areas suggests an improvement on 2017 overall. The number of disadvantaged pupils studying a modern foreign language (MFL) in key stage 4 remains low and you continue to explore ways to improve this. You are aware, for example, that the lack of a GCSE in MFL may limit opportunities for the most able pupils when applying for post-16 courses.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's strategies for teaching and assessing the most able pupils are understood by all staff, implemented consistently and monitored carefully to provide evidence of improved progress
- the strategies to improve pupils' progress in science are used consistently and

their impact is regularly evaluated

- all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, should have appropriate and meaningful access to the full range of subject experiences, including MFL at key stage 4
- those pupils with low attendance, particularly those who are disadvantaged, are closely monitored to bring them into line with the school average.

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

Yours sincerely

David Boyle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we held meetings with you, and senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, to discuss the work of the school. I also held a separate meeting with representatives of the governing body. We held informal conversations with pupils and staff. We visited 11 classes jointly with members of your senior team, across both key stages. We analysed a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation and aspects of the development plan; assessment and attendance information; safeguarding information; school policies and procedures. We checked the information on the school's website. We considered the views of 158 parents who replied to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the views of 59 staff and 76 pupils who responded to their Ofsted questionnaires.