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Mr Adam Darley
The Purbeck School
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Dear Mr Darley

Short inspection of The Purbeck School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018 with Malcolm Davison OI, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment to the post of headteacher in September 2016, you have ensured that the school continues to hold a strong position within the community. You have an established leadership team who work well together. Accurate evaluation and continual planning to improve are features within the leadership that assure success continues. Students' progress in the sixth form and overall progress measures in the end of key stage 4 tests have been very good. However, you and your team are not complacent about this and look more deeply at what needs to be done for every pupil and act accordingly.

Since the last inspection, the teaching of mathematics has improved substantially and it is now a leading subject within the school. Progress in mathematics in the end of key stage 4 tests in 2017 placed the school in the top 20% of schools nationally, with middle-ability and the most able pupils achieving significantly above pupils of similar abilities nationally. As a result, mathematics is among the most popular subjects taken at A level, with students achieving high grades in the sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are compliant. Staff are trained well on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation and the influences of radicalisation and extremism. Your designated safeguarding leaders make sure that the increasing numbers of pupils with complex needs are safe and secure in school. They work determinedly, yet

sensitively, with pupils, parents, carers and external agencies to monitor and support the most vulnerable pupils. Safeguarding arrangements for pupils are strong and part of the school's culture. This is vital because you are on an open site with a sports centre used by members of the public. You are assessing potential risks to the school community on a constant basis and acting accordingly.

Inspection findings

- Initially, we looked at what you have done to support teaching in subjects where outcomes have been weaker in recent years. For 18 months, there has been a concerted effort by leaders to improve teaching and learning. You have revised the curriculum to make sure that pupils' transition from key stage 2 to 3 is seamless. Equally, you have made sure that pupils are learning progressively in subjects within the five years before taking their end of key stage 4 tests. To maximise the impact of the curriculum, you have trained teachers to improve their planning before teaching so that individual pupils' needs are met and pupils' progress improves more rapidly. Teachers have received personalised training that has helped them improve their teaching as individuals. Teachers appreciate this and gain confidence in their work. Subject leaders model the constant evaluation of senior leaders and intervene with teachers and pupils as and when necessary. As a result, pupils' learning in subjects such as English and languages, which was weaker in the end of key stage 4 tests in 2017, has improved.
- Next, we looked at the progress of disadvantaged pupils, as this has been a cause for concern for some years, especially in the end of key stage 4 tests. You have implemented a planned and cohesive approach to supporting pupils' progress which has benefited disadvantaged pupils. You have linked the aspects of pupils' welfare, attendance, special educational needs (SEN) and behaviour when reviewing pupils' learning. In this way, you eliminate any external barriers and ensure that pupils are ready to learn, regardless of personal circumstances. Currently, disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 are performing as well as others and disadvantaged pupils in Year 8 are performing better than others. In other year groups, the differences are diminishing and previous poor attitudes and issues are waning. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have been performing well from their starting points for many years. Therefore, disadvantaged pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are doing well. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who leads this area, is well qualified and effective. There is, however, one area where progress in improvement has been less successful: this is in improving attendance for disadvantaged pupils. Attendance overall has improved and persistent absence has lessened. There are signs of improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, but steps are small. You know that this is an area that needs further attention.
- Pupils who come into the school with literacy and numeracy knowledge, understanding and skills that are below the expected standard for their age are supported well by wise spending of the Year 7 catch-up funding. Most importantly, leaders and teachers are flexible in their identification of pupils who need support. Initially, 28 pupils were identified following the outcomes of the end of key stage 2 tests. Thirteen pupils made good and rapid progress and no longer needed individual support. However, there are 38 pupils receiving support,

now, because of efficient identification of pupils' additional needs. The SENCo, with her highly skilled team, keeps a close watch on these pupils as they progress through the school in case they need further support at any time.

- Finally, we looked at learning within the sixth form. Overall outcomes for students are well above the national average; however, there were a small number of subjects that were not adding value to students' experiences. Some of these subjects had very few students, too. As a result of financial necessity and some underperformance, options have been revised. In addition, you are looking to provide greater choice for vocational options within the sixth form. Students shared with inspectors that this is something they want, so you are reacting well to their needs. There have been very good results in the applied general A levels offered already, so this is a secure path to pursue. You are checking the progress of students in the sixth form more closely, as you are in the rest of the school. Students are known well as individuals and are provided with meaningful careers guidance so that they leave the sixth form to follow appropriate paths in education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the positive changes to the curriculum and tracking processes are maintained so that pupils of every ability level reach the high standards of which they are capable
- the focus on improving attendance and reducing persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils continues, so that attendance and persistent absence are at least in line with national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathy Maddocks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, senior leaders, leaders of SEN, English and languages, the chair of governors and three other governors. Inspectors spoke formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons in English, languages and the sixth form. Inspectors looked at the quality of work in pupils' exercise books and considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding. Inspectors took into account 136 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 80 comments written by parents, the 62 staff responses and the 84 pupil responses.