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Mr Martyn Cooper
Headteacher
Belper School and Sixth Form Centre
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Dear Mr Cooper

Short inspection of Belper School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Paul Sweeney, 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 September 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 and your leadership team share a determination to improve the quality of education at Belper School and Sixth Form Centre. You know your school very well, including its strengths and weaknesses. Your self-evaluation is detailed, honest and accurate. Your plans to address the areas that need to improve are clear and appropriate. The vast majority of staff, pupils, parents and carers have a positive view and support the work of the school.

Your governors have a good awareness of the school's strengths. They also have a very clear understanding of the areas requiring development and what needs to be done to bring about improvement. Consequently, governors are well placed to provide appropriate challenge and support to you and your leaders.

Pupils' overall progress declined following your previous inspection. However, you identified what needed to be done and improvement plans have been focused on the right priorities. As a result, pupils' GCSE examination results improved in 2017 and, overall, they made progress that was broadly in line with the national average. However, some groups of pupils made less progress than they were capable of. You and your team are taking action to address the issues that affected the progress of

these groups of pupils.

Senior leaders continually seek to improve teaching and learning. The actions to improve teaching have had some success and helped to improve the progress pupils made in 2017. However, the quality of teaching across the school is still inconsistent in some areas and you identify that, despite improvements, this remains a priority for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the school's policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are well organised and effective. Appropriate checks are made on all staff and volunteers to make sure they are suitable to work with children. Record-keeping is of a good quality and any concerns are logged promptly and followed up appropriately. The school works well with a range of outside agencies to support pupils and make sure they are kept safe.

Pupils are safe and well cared for in school. Pupils are well informed about the things they can do to keep themselves safe and know who to turn to if they have any concerns. Pupils and parents believe that the school is a safe environment. They also say that bullying is rare and that, if it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively.

You make sure that all staff and governors fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities. You provide regular training to keep them updated on procedures and potential safeguarding risks. Consequently, you have established a culture of vigilance in the school.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to ensure that teachers' performance targets are challenging and measurable and match the school's priorities closely. The school has worked successfully at this and teachers' challenging performance targets are now fully focused on school priorities and are helping to secure improvements.
- The previous inspection report also called for improvements to be made to the way that the school reports to parents. Parents now get much better information about how pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve. Good use of comparative information is used to enable parents to see how their children are performing from one reporting cycle to the next.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have taken action to improve the quality of feedback pupils receive. Pupils more regularly receive the information they need to help them make improvements to their work. Time is more routinely used to enable pupils to respond to their feedback and improve their learning.
- The progress of pupils who enter the school with low prior attainment has been inconsistent in recent years. These pupils are now studying more appropriate courses and teachers are better at planning work that provides them with the

right level of challenge. Strategies to support them are having a positive impact on their progress.

- Disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as well as other pupils nationally in their GCSE examinations. Leaders have reviewed their approach to the spending of the pupil premium funding and are now using the money much more effectively. Teachers are much better equipped to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils in the classroom. Systems have been set up to track the performance of disadvantaged pupils more effectively and provide support to those pupils that are not on track to meet their targets. Consequently, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been improving. The progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is more rapid than the previous cohort, especially in Year 10. However, the school recognises that there is still more work to be done to ensure that their progress moves even closer to the national average.
- In the sixth form, students in Year 12 and Year 13 have made below average progress for the last three years. Action to resolve this underachievement has been slow. Leaders have now taken action to start to reverse this dip in progress. Sixth-form entry requirements have been reviewed and students now receive much greater guidance to ensure that they are placed on the right courses. The tracking of student progress has been enhanced to enable the school to intervene more effectively with underachieving students. Nevertheless, teaching in the sixth form remains inconsistent. Data provided by the school on current students indicates that progress is on track to improve but further improvements are still needed, particularly for the most able sixth-form students.
- Attendance rightly continues to be a priority for the school. The overwhelming majority of pupils attend school on time every day. However, a small but significant number of pupils struggle to get to school. These pupils often have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged. Some of the strategies used in the past to improve the attendance of these pupils have not made the required impact. Therefore, you have reviewed what you do and have introduced new strategies. Many of the actions are at an early stage and, as a consequence, it is too soon to see their full impact. Nevertheless, there are some early signs of success and the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, there is still more work to be done to improve the attendance of these pupils further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work to improve teaching in the sixth form so that students make consistently good progress
- they continue to take action to reduce the differences between the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and the progress and attendance of other pupils nationally
- they continue to take action so that the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities improves further.

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

Yours sincerely

Nigel Boyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, other senior leaders and governors. Inspectors visited a number of subject areas with your senior leaders to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. They met with groups of pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks on staff. They reviewed records about attendance and examined a range of other documentary evidence, including that relating to your ongoing self-evaluation and data on pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspectors considered the views of 87 parents through their responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and Ofsted's free-text service. They considered the 63 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the 46 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.