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Mr Michael Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of The Phoenix Collegiate

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Peter Bassett, Ofsted Inspector, and Nicola Walters, 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 2015.

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 findings, 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.**

Since taking up the post of headteacher in January 2018, you have made several key appointments and extended the senior leadership team. You use the school's self-evaluation and prioritise areas that require attention. There are new systems and actions in place to address those pupils' outcomes that are in need of improvement. You show commitment to raising standards through securing high-quality teaching and learning. However, you acknowledge that more time is needed to fully embed the changes so that they have a direct, positive effect on outcomes.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were charged with accelerating the achievement of all pupils. Despite some improvements, it still remains the case that not all teachers regularly provide the most able pupils with work which is sufficiently challenging. This holds back their progress. More recently, leaders have taken steps to address this issue, but it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of this work. Leaders' success in addressing other areas for improvement identified at the last inspection has been variable. As a result, some areas, including increasing the progress rates of disadvantaged pupils, need further work.

The Phoenix Collegiate is an inclusive and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy their education and staff are proud of the school. The school's culture encourages calm

and orderly conduct and this was evident during the inspection. Governors are committed to the school, have a sound understanding of issues and concerns, and challenge and support leaders effectively.

Pupils are polite and willing to talk with visitors. Pupils generally spoke positively about being part of the school community and about the support they receive from their teachers. Sixth-form students spoke confidently about their achievements, the effective careers advice they receive and the enrichment opportunities they are given. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school. Staff appreciate leaders' support, particularly with regard to managing their workload.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders and staff ensure pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders carry out appropriate checks on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. The school has very well-established and effective practices to ensure that any concerns about pupils are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Training for all staff is regular, up to date and effective. Identification and reporting systems are robust, and referrals made to external agencies are appropriate. Leaders and governors monitor safeguarding effectively and maintain a strong oversight. Leaders are aware of issues within the local community and work closely with external agencies.

Pupils feel safe at school. They can explain how they learn to keep safe and to manage risks. Pupils say that if they have concerns about bullying, matters are resolved quickly and successfully. Staff agree that the school is safe and that any instances of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- The school receives a high level of pupil premium funding because almost half of the school's pupils are disadvantaged. The school has a clear plan to spend this funding well. A newly appointed pupil premium coordinator is evaluating the impact of the plan and, as a result, is restructuring the support given to disadvantaged pupils. For example, strategies to improve the literacy and numeracy of key stage 3 pupils have been implemented. The full effect of these measures is not yet evident. For some years, disadvantaged pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 has been well below national averages, compared with other pupils. Leaders' current monitoring records suggest that there have been recent improvements in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. However, evidence of improved progress was not evident during the inspection.
- The progress made by the most able pupils is inconsistent. The quality of teachers' guidance to help these pupils improve varies and the level of challenge they are presented with is not always sufficient. In Year 11, high-prior-attaining pupils take part in conferences, which they describe as 'motivational' and 'helpful'. However, these pupils say that they want more challenge in lessons, especially in mathematics.

- Leaders are resolving difficulties in recruiting teachers in mathematics. Leaders of mathematics make sure that there are sufficient resources to deliver the curriculum. Teachers' professional development in mathematics has concentrated too much on content rather than on approaches to teaching. Gaps remain in pupils' mathematical knowledge, especially at key stage 4. Senior leaders are aware of these concerns and have increased the number of teaching groups in Year 11. Detailed analysis of pupils' test performance informs revision programmes. Although evidence from leaders' monitoring records point to improvements in progress in mathematics, this is not consistently so.
- Where teachers plan to a high level, they meet the needs of most groups of pupils, and teaching and learning are most effective. For example, lessons are effectively planned in English and humanities. Pupils' books generally show that there is evidence of progress over time.
- Leaders have introduced more robust systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and the sharing of effective practice. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this on improving pupils' outcomes.
- The sixth form is a strength of the school. Students do better across subjects, in both academic and applied general qualifications, than those with similar starting points nationally. Leaders and teachers have identified those students who have the potential to achieve the highest grades. Opportunities to challenge and support these students have been introduced and are used effectively, although they are too recent to have had their full impact. There are effective approaches to teaching in science and in performing arts lessons. The most effective practice in sixth-form teaching, however, is not shared widely enough.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- effective systems to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching are fully developed and strong practice in teaching is shared more widely across the school
- pupil premium funding is used more effectively to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils across key stages 3 and 4, especially in mathematics
- strategies to improve the progress and attainment of the most able pupils are developed across all key stages.

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

Yours sincerely

David Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, and with pupils both formally and informally. Inspectors made visits to lessons, some of which were accompanied by senior leaders. Pupils' work in books was evaluated and inspectors talked to pupils about their learning. The results of inspection surveys regarding the views of pupils, parents and staff were considered. Inspectors evaluated school documents, including information about pupils' progress, safeguarding information and the school's self-evaluation and development plan.