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Mrs Hilary Burkett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Burkett

Short inspection of Hillview School for Girls

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Susan Willman and Anne Lewell, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your appointment as headteacher in January 2016 followed a period of changes in leadership, and now provides stability and continuity.

Your determination to provide the best possible standard of education for each pupil is clear. You are well supported in this by your leadership team, your staff, and a very dedicated and effective governing body. You have accurately identified areas of recent underperformance, taking, and continuing to take, appropriate actions to bring about improvements.

You and your staff promote the school's core values of 'inspiration, innovation, independence, inclusivity' in a positive manner. You set increasingly high levels of expectation and aspiration, to which pupils respond well. The learning environment is calm and well ordered. The school's status as a performing arts college is promoted and celebrated well throughout the buildings by a variety of display work that is both attractive and informative. Parents and carers are strongly positive in their views of the school. As one parent commented, 'I am extremely happy with the school.'

Pupils achieve positive outcomes in English as a result of the high-quality teaching they receive. Progress by the end of key stage 4 in 2017 was well above the national average. Outcomes in a range of performing arts subjects were similarly positive.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted several strengths in the care and support of pupils, their behaviour and achievement, and the quality of teaching. Inspectors challenged school leaders to improve teaching by sharing the best practice across the school. Furthermore, you were tasked with developing pupils' literacy, numeracy, research and critical-thinking skills in a wide range of subjects. You know your school well and have worked hard to successfully address these areas for improvement.

You acknowledge that outcomes last year in science, geography and history were not as strong as you had hoped. Disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as others. You have made appropriate improvements that have had a positive impact on outcomes in geography and history. However, you recognise that teaching in science and the progress of disadvantaged pupils still need some improvement.

Your determined and effective action to improve attendance is leading to improvements, although the attendance of disadvantaged pupils still remains a challenge that you are continuing to address.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a positive culture of safeguarding that runs through the school and makes sure that pupils are safe and secure. This is well supported by robust systems and procedures that meet statutory requirements and are fit for purpose. Pupils say that they feel very safe in the school, and this is strongly supported by the views of parents. One pupil commented, 'Teachers are swift to act if we have a problem.'

Your designated safeguarding lead is well supported by three deputies. Recruitment procedures are thorough because leaders and governors have been appropriately trained in safer recruitment. Training of staff is both comprehensive and regular. For example, staff that join the school mid-year receive suitable safeguarding training as part of their induction to the school. In addition, leaders provide regular training relating to any changes in safeguarding practices as required, including child protection. As a result, all staff know the signs to look out for that may indicate a pupil is at risk of harm, and know what action to take when necessary to support vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including:
 - the extent to which you have improved the quality of teaching to bring about improvements in progress and outcomes in science and the humanities
 - how successful leaders have been in improving attendance overall and reducing the levels of persistent absence, and
 - how successful leaders have been in improving progress and outcomes for

disadvantaged pupils.

- You acknowledge that due to previous issues in teaching and curriculum planning, pupils made comparatively slower progress in science, geography and history last year. You have taken action to address this. Evidence from learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work and current assessment information show that the changes have led to improvements in the quality of teaching in geography and history. As a result, pupils are now making faster progress in those two subjects. The level of challenge for pupils in science is not consistently effective. As a result, this subject remains an area of focus for leaders.
- Attendance overall in 2017 showed a decline compared to the strong levels of attendance of previous years. The level of persistent absence followed a similar pattern. In particular, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was a concern. Leaders have worked effectively together, and with external agencies, adopting a number of strategies to secure improvement. For example, leaders have rewarded good attendance, undertaken home visits, and provided support from the additional funding available for disadvantaged pupils. Since September 2017, overall attendance has improved and it now matches the national figure. There has been some improvement, but increasing the level of attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains a focus for the school.
- Progress and attainment for the comparatively small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school have lagged behind those of other pupils. Following a review of the use of pupil premium funding, interventions have been refined. While disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in several subjects, you accept that there is still some way to go to bring about sustained improvements overall.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in science in key stages 3 and 4 improve
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve across subjects by:
 - the use of carefully targeted support
 - improving levels of attendance for this group of pupils so as to maximise their learning time.

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

Yours sincerely

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas the inspectors would focus on during the inspection. Inspectors held further discussions with you, your senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. A telephone conversation was also held with the headteacher of the local pupil referral unit.

Inspectors, accompanied by you and senior leaders, visited 20 lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders. Inspectors took account of 184 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered written comments from 87 parents. Inspectors also considered the 77 staff responses, and 276 responses from pupils on the online questionnaires. Inspectors visited an assembly, and met with pupils in Years 10 and 11. In addition, we analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, minutes of governors' meetings, and safeguarding policies and procedures.