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Mr Alex Foreman
Principal
Duke of York's Royal Military School
Dover
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Dear Mr Foreman

Short inspection of Duke of York's Royal Military School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2018 with Daniel Lambert HMI, 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 May 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 in January 2017, you have worked tirelessly to improve the culture and ethos of the school. A large majority of pupils, staff, parents and carers recognise and appreciate the way you have developed a more inclusive, open and safe environment. As one parent said, 'The new principal has brought many positive changes in staff, direction and energy.' Supported by a talented and enthusiastic group of senior and middle leaders, you have made high-quality teaching and learning your key priority, raising teachers' aspirations of what pupils can do and achieve. As a result, current pupils in all year groups and across subjects are making faster progress.

Pupils acknowledge and value the strong levels of support, guidance and care they receive both in lessons and in their boarding houses. Staff know their pupils extremely well, and relationships between them are warm and respectful. In lessons, there is an industrious and purposeful atmosphere and pupils clearly enjoy working collaboratively. Pupils are friendly and polite to visitors and each other and are fiercely proud of and loyal to their school. They value the school's distinctive military character and are enthusiastic participants in the large and varied range of extra-curricular activities. One pupil noted, 'There are so many clubs and opportunities for Dukies.' Consequently, pupils enjoy school and behave in an exemplary way, which has a positive effect on their learning and progress.

Following your arrival at the school, you quickly analysed the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, you restructured your senior leadership team and made sure that systems to track and monitor pupils' progress and teachers' performance were strengthened. Leaders at all levels have responded enthusiastically to the higher expectations you have of them. Middle leaders told inspectors that they value the support and challenge senior colleagues offer them and the wide range of professional training opportunities to improve their practice. In particular, they feel that the occasions where staff work together across departments to discuss teaching and learning are proving enormously beneficial.

Governors are developing greater confidence in their role and are frequent visitors to the school. They offer support and challenge in equal measure and are passionate about ensuring that all pupils achieve their very best. You have welcomed the support from the local authority and the opportunity to work more closely with colleagues in neighbouring schools. As a result, the school is more outward-facing than in the past, and staff and pupils are benefiting from the sharing of ideas.

You are clear that while a great deal of progress has been made, there is more to do if the school is to become outstanding. You understand the importance of evaluating the many actions you have put in place, to ensure that they are having the desired effect, and making sure that your development plan aligns more closely with your self-evaluation document. You also appreciate that while the quality of teaching and learning has improved markedly, some most-able pupils are not making the progress they should.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is of paramount importance in the school. All staff and governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils very seriously and are constantly alert to any issues. Staff and governor training, and any necessary updating of expertise, is well-planned and delivered effectively. The leadership team has ensured that all statutory safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

There is an effective online system for pupils and staff to report any safeguarding concerns, which are immediately picked up and acted upon by the designated safeguarding staff. Leaders work closely with the local authority and outside agencies, such as the early help team, to ensure that pupils are given the support they need quickly. In addition, senior leaders meet weekly to discuss any safeguarding issues, a meeting frequently attended by the designated safeguarding governor.

Pupils who responded to the online questionnaire and those interviewed by inspectors said that they feel safe in school. They are confident to talk to teachers or house staff if they meet any difficulties. They say that poor behaviour, including bullying, is rare and dealt with effectively if it does occur. There is a culture of acceptance and celebration of all pupils' differences, including religious and sexual preferences.

Pupils are taught how to deal with any risks they may routinely face, such as from the internet or social networking sites. For example, one pupil said, 'We had workshops which showed us what we had shared online. This really brought it home to us.' Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and appreciate the efforts the school makes to protect them. For example, all pupils carry a card containing emergency telephone numbers to get help if they are in difficulty, which is especially useful if they are off-site.

Inspection findings

- Over time, most-able pupils have not performed as well as other groups in the school. Inspectors therefore visited a number of lessons to see most-able pupils at work and to look at their books. A good proportion of the most able pupils are making strong progress in subjects such as humanities, dance, science, mathematics and English. For example, in an English lesson, pupils were encouraged to debate, consider and argue their points of view, which helped them to make links with learning in other lessons.
- In pupils' books, teachers frequently give pupils meaningful advice on how to improve their work. Where pupils have responded to this, it is clear that they have deepened their knowledge, skills and understanding, which is helping them to make faster progress. However, there are inconsistencies in this approach across and between subjects, so some of the most able pupils are not making the progress they should. In addition, some have a lot of catching up to do due to a legacy of weaker teaching in the past.
- School leaders keep the curriculum under review and have made appropriate changes, such as discontinuing the European Computer Driving Licence qualification, which was not meeting pupils' needs. There is bespoke provision for the most able pupils, such as the opportunity to study the separate sciences. Recent changes in leadership of the humanities and modern languages departments have placed these subjects on a firmer footing, so all pupils, especially high-ability pupils, are making faster progress in these previously weaker areas.
- Students in the sixth form have not made as much progress as their peers nationally in the past. Inspectors looked closely at this area of the school and found that stronger leadership of the sixth form is having a positive impact on students' rates of progress. The recently appointed head of sixth form has injected greater challenge and rigour into teaching and learning, coupled with better monitoring and tracking of students' progress. Expectations of students have been raised, for example those not delivering the required effort are placed in 'super prep' for supervised study. As a result, more students are now submitting work on time and of higher quality.
- Students entering the sixth form now receive more timely advice and guidance to ensure that they are placed on the appropriate courses. In addition, students have more opportunities to develop their leadership skills by, for example, working with younger pupils on a range of activities such as hearing them read. As a consequence, students' academic and wider skills are improving, preparing them better for life beyond school. Almost all enter education, employment or training, and the vast majority attain places at their first choice of university.

- Historically, the school's rates of fixed and permanent exclusions were too high. School leaders have addressed this by improving the quality of teaching and learning and promoting a solution-focused approach to misbehaviour. The inclusion centre helps targeted pupils learn how to modify their behaviour and has a proven track record of success. The house system and staff members' extensive knowledge of individual pupils have resulted in swift and supportive intervention with pupils at risk of misbehaviour. This change in approach to behaviour management has had a profound effect; incidents of poor behaviour have dramatically reduced, and in this academic year there have been no exclusions at all. A culture of high behavioural expectations and support for vulnerable pupils is now well developed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning improves by requiring teachers and other adults to offer consistent challenge for the most able pupils
- they evaluate actions in the school development plan more sharply to monitor their effectiveness in improving pupils' outcomes.

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

Paula Sargent
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, teachers, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with the chair of governors and considered the written submission of a further three governors. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's staff. We scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, safeguarding records and information about pupils' achievement and behaviour. We considered the views expressed in 94 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 196 free-text comments by parents, together with 124 questionnaires returned by pupils and 56 returned by school staff.