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Mr Tim Carroll
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Carroll

Short inspection of Vandyke Upper School and Community College

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2018 with Lesley Daniel, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Vandyke Upper School has maintained the good quality of education identified at the previous inspection, where pupils develop both academically and socially. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that the school provides a both supportive and academic setting where pupils can flourish. For example, parents stated that pupils are 'pushed and challenged to make the best possible progress', and one parent's comment that 'we always recommend this school' was echoed by many others.

Determined leadership, including that of governors, has ensured that pupils have full access to a broad and balanced curriculum whereby pupils can select from a range of engaging subjects. You provide a clear plan for success which is shared by staff and pupils. One parent commented that 'the headteacher and leaders must be commended for their work in providing a friendly and encouraging social ethos.'

Pupils typically behave very well both in the classroom and around the school. They are courteous, welcoming and respectful. Pupils respond well to the high expectations of staff, and this is reflected in the achievements of many pupils across the year groups in a wide range of subjects. Through your 'Life Skills' programme, which begins in Year 9, pupils develop an informed understanding of how to be more effective learners alongside the attributes required to be tolerant, empathetic citizens of 21st-century Britain. Similarly, students in the sixth form perform charity work to inform their understanding of the importance of helping one another.

You correctly judge English to be a strength of the school. Strong leadership in English has ensured that pupils make rapid progress and achieve well. Through frequent monitoring of pupils' progress and the consequent identification of their relative strengths and weaknesses, staff ensure that activities and tasks meet the needs of each pupil. As a result, pupils develop strong reading and writing skills which enable them to access the rest of the curriculum successfully. The previous inspection report raised the importance of ensuring the dissemination of the common approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and speaking and listening. This has been addressed through the increased time allotted to English in the school timetable and the enhanced focus in lessons other than English.

You and your leaders take effective action where you consider improvements are required. For example, you concurred with the previous inspection report that the most able pupils were not consistently achieving above the national average in 2015. Through rigorous improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the most able pupils made progress that was well above the national average in English in 2017. However, you recognise that this remains inconsistent in some other subjects such as mathematics and science and you have firm plans in place to address this. Although attendance has improved, you acknowledge that it is still below the national average and you continue to address it through a range of strategies.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils expressed their confidence in the staff's capacity and commitment to keeping them safe and well cared for. Pupils spoke positively about the support offered to them to help manage their emotional well-being. Pupils spoke about the ways in which staff responded swiftly and appropriately to issues that they may experience. As a consequence, there is a harmonious learning environment throughout the school.

Pupils can define bullying and the forms it can take. They explained that bullying was not a common occurrence and that it is dealt with effectively when identified.

Leaders, including governors, are vigilant regarding the physical safety and emotional well-being of their pupils. Records, including the checks made on adults who work at the school, are carefully and securely maintained. Inspection evidence demonstrates that when a pupil is in need of help, timely and appropriate support is provided.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was to look at how the leadership team is ensuring that the most able pupils at key stage 4 and students at key stage 5 make accelerated progress and exceed national expectations in their examinations. The previous inspection report noted the importance of raising the attainment and progress of the most able pupils. In 2017, the overall progress and attainment of the most able pupils at key stage 4

declined to below the national average. However, leaders have accurately identified the areas that require improvement, in particular mathematics and science, and have put in place systems and approaches to try to ensure that the most able pupils achieve above average in 2018. Having identified English as a model of excellent practice, leaders and staff in both mathematics and science now monitor pupils' progress more frequently. They use the information gained from this monitoring to inform lesson planning, ensuring that pupils' weaknesses are addressed effectively. Additionally, in line with the English department, mathematics and science leaders and staff regularly review where pupils are grouped to ensure that pupils are suitably challenged. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this approach.

- English leaders and staff have also supported other subject areas to strengthen pupils' reading and writing skills so that they can respond more effectively to examination questions. For example, staff make explicit the subject vocabulary required to succeed in mathematics, science, design and technology, art, media studies and music.
- The most able students in the sixth form did not make accelerated progress in 2017 in their respective subjects. However, inspection evidence demonstrates that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form is strong. As a consequence, current assessment information indicates that the most able students are making rapid progress in a range of subjects.
- Students spoke very positively about the additional support provided to ensure that they exceed national expectations. The curriculum in the sixth form includes a very strong focus on guidance for further education and careers. Students spoke very highly about the quality of guidance and the ways in which staff support and nurture individual aspirations. As a result, the number of students continuing to either higher education or work is above average.
- My second key line of enquiry was about whether the school offered a broad and balanced curriculum. Inspection evidence demonstrated that pupils at key stages 3 and 4 have opportunities to study a wide range of subjects such as French, German, music and product design. Pupils spoke very highly about the guidance that leaders and staff provide regarding subject choices at GCSE. Leaders of many subjects such as art and design, design and technology, music, physical education and media studies acknowledge that improvements in pupils' literacy skills have had an impact on pupils' success in their respective subjects. Consequently, an increased proportion of pupils craft higher-quality and longer responses to examination-style questions in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- My third line of enquiry focused on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Inspection evidence showed that pupils made strong progress across the curriculum. Through a range of additional support, such as well-trained teaching assistants, pupils make strong progress.
- Leaders and staff set appropriately challenging targets for pupils to enable them to make progress in both academic and social settings.
- My fourth line of enquiry was about the progress of disadvantaged pupils across the curriculum. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made strong overall progress at

the end of key stage 4. However, disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress in mathematics and science as they did in English. Drawing on the excellent practice demonstrated in English, leaders of mathematics and science have adapted their approaches, such as more frequent monitoring and bespoke support. As a result, current assessment information demonstrates that disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress in mathematics and science.

- Although leaders' enhanced focus on reducing pupil absence has resulted in improvements, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still below the national average. Leaders, including governors, continue to work hard to address this through working closely with parents. In addition, leaders continue to highlight the intrinsic link between school attendance and achievement through school-wide posters, assemblies and attendance panels.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders support pupils to keep safe both at school and beyond. Staff unanimously felt that pupils are safe and well protected in school. Pupils learn how to keep safe when online and why it is important to do so. Pupils also learn about healthy relationships and the importance of good physical health.
- Students in the sixth form receive bespoke, personalised support dependent on their needs. Students spoke highly of the support and guidance offered by staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the leadership of mathematics and science is as consistently strong as the leadership of English
- the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, continues to improve so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of seven governors.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. We also met with a group of 12 pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and five students from the sixth form.

- During two tours of the school with you and your leaders, inspectors visited a range of classes and observed pupils at work.
- Inspectors undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governor meetings and curriculum plans.
- I considered the views of 50 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views parents expressed via free-text. I also considered the views of 71 members of staff.