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Mr Andrew Crofts
Principal
Quest Academy
Farnborough Avenue
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Dear Mr Crofts

Short inspection of Quest Academy

Following my visit with Jenny Gaynor, Ofsted Inspector, to the school on 6 June 2018, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong and effective leadership has ensured that the school continues to improve. Leaders communicate a clear vision of a learning journey for all pupils as they progress through the school. Since the last inspection, the sixth form has grown steadily. In 2017, all those students who left the school secured places at university or were accepted onto apprenticeships. Just under one in five students went to Russell Group universities, with one student gaining a place at Oxford University. This impressive figure is above the London average.

Your leaders have focused on improving teaching by visiting classrooms and providing effective advice and guidance to teachers to improve their practice. Inspectors observed that pupils are now more confident in expressing themselves orally, so that pupils of different abilities progress well. Consequently, pupils continue to achieve very well at GCSE and progress is strong in most subjects. The proportion of strong passes in both GCSE English and mathematics continues to be above national averages. However, visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' work showed that, sometimes, lower ability pupils were not always supported effectively enough to ensure that they achieved their best. Also, progress in history and geography has been significantly weak for the past three years and we agreed that this would be one focus for the inspection.

When speaking to inspectors, pupils were appreciative of the range of opportunities available to them both within the curriculum and in the enrichment sessions after

school. You have created a strong learning culture in the school whereby most pupils understand the importance of behaving well. Inspectors found pupils to be both courteous and respectful. They usually conduct themselves in an orderly way around the school. However, some teachers do not always apply the school's behaviour management procedures consistently. When this occurs, this leads to inattentive behaviour by a minority of pupils.

You and your leadership team are well supported by an effective team of governors, who have a solid working knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They regularly visit the school to meet with staff and observe learning with leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have led the creation of a strong safeguarding culture. Staff, when surveyed, confirmed this. All the pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they felt safe and well looked after. They reported that bullying is very rare and when it does occur, it is effectively dealt with. Your curriculum covers safeguarding issues thoroughly. As a result, pupils were able to tell inspectors about threats they might face and how to keep safe.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. The recruitment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are comprehensive and up to date. Leaders have developed strong partnerships with external providers and other schools to ensure that child protection cases are dealt with effectively.

Inspection findings

- We first decided to investigate how leaders were reducing levels of exclusion, particularly among boys. Between 2014 and 2016, rates of fixed-term exclusion, while declining, were above the national average. In 2016, just over three quarters of all exclusions were of boys.
- Senior leaders have put in place effective strategies, including the 'four-star standard', through which pupils work to achieve stars and can also lose them through poor behaviour. When speaking to inspectors, pupils were strongly supportive of this strategy. One pupil reported, 'The four-star system is really good because it makes us want to stay on target and improve our behaviour.'
- Achievement coordinators, linked to every year group, rigorously monitor low-level behavioural incidents. They then intervene promptly with the offending pupils.
- As a result of these strategies, there are fewer pupils in detention, and fewer meetings with parents and carers to discuss poor behaviour. The number of more serious incidents has reduced significantly too. Because minor incidents are being effectively tackled before they escalate, exclusions, for more serious incidents, were below the national average last year.

- Although there are still some inconsistencies in the way behaviour is managed in classrooms, leaders have been very successful in reducing the number of major incidents that lead to exclusion.
- Next, we agreed to find out how effective leaders' actions to improve results in history and geography have been. Compared with other schools nationally, and compared with other results at Quest Academy, progress has been weak over the past three years.
- In 2017, overall results were adversely affected by the decision to enter a group studying geography as an enrichment activity for an examination. This group did not achieve well. Analysis of these results shows that when this group is taken out, there was an improvement on the previous year. Just over three quarters of pupils entered achieved a grade 4 or 5 (previously grade C) or higher in history, and almost two thirds gained a grade 4 or 5 or higher in geography.
- New leadership in humanities, the department responsible for both history and geography, together with staffing changes instigated by leaders, is showing a positive impact. Teachers have been set challenging targets in the department plan, though strategies to achieve them were not as clearly set out. A stronger focus on developing subject vocabulary and new curriculum plans have been implemented in history. In geography, work on this has yet to be completed.
- When looking at pupils' work, inspectors found evidence of stronger progress in both subjects, particularly among the most able pupils. Work was presented to a high standard and skills in extended writing were developing well. However, less effective support for pupils with lower prior attainment has limited their progress. Leaders are starting to address this by developing new resources.
- Although improvements in geography and for lower attainers need to be strengthened further, there is strong evidence that progress in both history and geography is improving. Another indicator of this is the increasing numbers of pupils opting to take the subjects at GCSE.
- Finally, we agreed to see how far the curriculum, particularly in the upper school, meets the needs and aspirations of pupils as well as preparing them for their next steps. In 2017, just over three quarters of the pupils were entered for a computing course, and just over one in 10 pupils were entered for both a modern foreign language and either history or geography to achieve the English Baccalaureate. This figure is much lower than the national average.
- The school's website indicates that pupils choose their options in Year 8, beginning their courses in Year 9. Inspectors found evidence in pupils' work that the strong focus on literacy development in the lower school prepares pupils effectively for examination courses.
- Inspectors found that there is a broad range of subjects on offer to pupils who, when speaking to inspectors, were very positive about the variety of opportunities available to them. They appreciated the guidance activities the school provides, but they were often unclear as to how the choices they made would affect the opportunities available to them in the future. Some pupils indicated that they found starting GCSE courses in Year 9 very demanding. In visits to Year 9 classes, inspectors also found that some lower ability pupils were

struggling.

- The impact of the current curriculum is strong and, in most subjects, pupils achieve results showing better progress than pupils nationally. This includes the most able pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language, both of which groups made even stronger progress in 2017.
- As a result of improvements in humanities and languages provision, more pupils are opting for these subjects in Years 9 and 10. This means that the number of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate will be more in line with that in other schools nationally.
- Although pupils are not always fully aware of the implications of the choices they make in the upper school, the curriculum at Quest Academy is mostly successful in meeting their needs and aspirations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in history and geography continue to improve by focusing on consistency of provision across both subject areas
- pupils are fully aware of how their option choices affect future progression opportunities
- resources and provision match the needs of all pupils, particularly those in Year 9.

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

Yours sincerely

James Whiting
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Accompanied by senior leaders, inspectors visited classrooms across a range of subjects. Together, they observed the quality of teaching and learning and spoke to pupils about their work. Inspectors interviewed senior and middle leaders, governors, the previous and current executive headteachers, and groups of pupils from across the age range. Inspectors observed behaviour around the school at break- and lunchtime. They also scrutinised documentation, pupils' work in history and geography and responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View (15 responses) and a staff survey (53 responses).