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2 July 2018

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Dear Jennifer Giovanelli

Short inspection of Kingsthorpe College

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2018 with Richard Vasey, Ofsted Inspector, and Claire Shepherd, 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 May 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 priorities, 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 2017, following a short period as acting principal, you have made several key appointments and extended the senior leadership team. Only one member of the current leadership team was in post during the last inspection. The team you have created is passionate and committed to the ethos that 'everything is possible'. You use the school's self-evaluation to identify areas that require attention. There are new systems in place and action is being taken to improve achievement in subjects where it is not good enough. You show strong commitment to raising standards through securing high-quality learning and teaching, rather than 'quick fixes'. However, you acknowledge that more time is needed to embed the changes fully so they have a direct, positive effect where achievement is not good enough. This is particularly the case in mathematics and humanities.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were tasked with improving students' attendance and reducing the number of pupils who are regularly absent. Leaders have responded quickly, but despite some improvements, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Leaders' success in addressing other areas for improvement identified at the last inspection has been variable. As a result, some

areas, including middle leaders ensuring consistency across the college, need further work. Pupils told inspectors that the level of challenge they experience 'depends on the teacher'.

Since the last inspection, there has been a lot of change and adjustment. Many leaders and teachers are new or recently appointed. You have quickly established a culture of high expectations, well-being and trust, and where staff are proud to be at Kingsthorpe College. Teachers appreciate leaders' support, particularly with regard to managing their workload. Governors are committed to the college, have a sound understanding of strengths and concerns, and challenge and support leaders very effectively. They are acutely aware of the issues that still need addressing and are working closely with the leaders to make sure this happens.

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. A parent who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said, 'Teachers go above and beyond to ensure the happiness of the pupils.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders ensure that the school's policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders and staff ensure pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders carry out thorough checks on new members of 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. Training for all staff is regular, up to date and effective. Identification and reporting systems are robust, and referrals are made to external agencies when necessary.

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 bullying is rare but 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

- Pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, was in line with the national average last year. However, this was a decline from the previous year. Senior leaders have provided bespoke training and support for teachers to help them check pupils' understanding so they can match work to pupils' prior attainment. This, along with changes to middle leaders and greater accountability, has resulted in some improvements, but there is too much variation between subject areas. The school's information suggests that the overall GCSE results for 2018 will be at least maintained, along with improvements in the number of pupils achieving basic qualifications.

- You have rightly prioritised improving the quality of teaching in mathematics and humanities because the 2017 examination results and progress scores for pupils were significantly below national figures. You are resolving difficulties in recruiting subject specialist teachers in mathematics and have strengthened leadership of this subject. There is now greater expertise in the department and leaders have introduced techniques to help learners, such as 'low-stakes testing'. However, evidence gathered during the inspection shows that the quality of teaching in this area is still too variable and some pupils find the tasks they are set too easy and, consequently, it does not challenge their thinking or interest them sufficiently.
- Most pupils in key stage 4 study a humanities subject. You have changed the curriculum so that subjects on offer to pupils are matched to their needs and interests. You recognise that teaching in this curriculum area does not support pupils to express their ideas sufficiently in their written work. Subsequent steps to strengthen teaching in these areas such as the use of 'knowledge organisers' are beginning to have an impact, but inspectors found that there is still more to do. Pupils also told inspectors that the quality of teaching in these subjects is not consistently good enough.
- In 2017, the rate of attendance was lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils who were regularly absent from school was too high. You and your senior leaders have identified reducing absence as a priority and have made the importance of regular attendance high profile. You have appointed an attendance and welfare officer and have introduced an extensive range of strategies. Despite this there has been no improvement in overall attendance. The strategies have helped to improve further the attendance of pupils who already attend regularly, but the school's current monitoring shows that there are still too many pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, who miss school regularly.
- Leaders have created an ethos where expectations of the progress made by all groups in the sixth form are high. A range of strategies to develop students' independence and the use of personalised learning checklists help to identify where extra support is needed. Teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge that was used to engage, challenge and enthuse the students. The use of verbal feedback and questioning helps make sure that all students understand what is required of them. Inspection evidence, including the school's assessment information, shows that students' overall progress in the sixth form is strong. Students enjoy their lessons and attend well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in mathematics and humanities improves quickly so that the progress made by pupils at least matches that of other pupils nationally
- along with middle leaders, they further develop ways to evaluate the impact of strategies used to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching
- the attendance of pupils who are frequently absent, particularly disadvantaged

pupils, improves rapidly.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Vasey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we held meetings with you and senior and middle leaders. I held a phone conversation with the chair of the governing board and the school improvement partner from the Collaborative Academies Trust. We made observations of learning across the school, some jointly with senior leaders. We looked at examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. We held meetings with pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and spoke with pupils informally. We scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's development plans, assessment information, records of recruitment checks and information relating to attendance. We took account of responses to questionnaires from 56 staff and considered eight responses from parents to the Ofsted Parent View online survey.