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12 July 2018

Mr Gary Nixon
Chief Executive Officer
Aegir – A Specialist Academy
Sweyn Lane
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Dear Mr Nixon

Short inspection of Aegir – A Specialist Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 2018 with Janis Warren, 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 predecessor 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. You, the principal and the vice-principal form a very effective senior leadership team. Your passion and dedication to provide a secure and stimulating environment is enabling pupils to reach their potential. More pupils are achieving good outcomes, in academic subjects and in an increasing range of vocational subjects. Pupils' outcomes have risen year on year since the previous inspection. Last year, some of the most able pupils achieved the equivalent of a GCSE standard pass in English and mathematics for the first time in the school's history.

The school is a bright, warm and welcoming environment. Pupils' art work is on display through the school and it is noticeable how pupils take pride in their work. Pupils have drawn and painted their idols and created African masks to a good standard. Older pupils confidently support younger pupils in lessons and at breaktimes. The staff interact very well with the pupils and encourage them to speak and engage with others to improve their communication skills. All staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire say they feel proud to work at the school. Pupils who met us spoke very highly about the support they receive from the staff to help them to achieve. The school is a harmonious place.

The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Each year, pupils participate in residential journeys to France, the Lake District

or to Cornwall. Pupils say how much they enjoy the visits because they have opportunities to do activities in which they would not otherwise engage. In addition, pupils' self-confidence develops rapidly. One pupil took it upon himself to become head chef for the group on a residential trip. The school values and fundamental British values are closely linked and are promoted well. Pupils have learned about the rule of law and were informed of the consequences of breaking the law through listening to a prison officer. Pupils visit different places of worship, and each year celebrate five different cultures on an international day. In addition, the school organises extra-curricular activities, such as 'Samba City' and 'Aegir's Got Talent', to provide opportunities for pupils to perform and gain confidence. Pupils' personal and emotional development are closely monitored, and staff recognise pupils' achievements in these areas through presenting them with character awards at an annual ceremony.

Pupils in the sixth form study a wide range of vocational and academic subjects. Staff know the pupils well and encourage them to participate in activities at home, for example volunteering, to support their achievement at school. Pupils' achievements in English and mathematics have improved in the last two years, with more pupils gaining higher qualifications. Nearly all pupils have achieved a place at college or appropriate social care provision in the last three years. In addition, the school checks that pupils have remained on their placements and offer further support if required. Students in the sixth form are given more responsibility to organise fundraising events. Students have organised their own 'prom' and barbecues. The 'Team 16' has fundraised to re-cover the pool table. Students become confident individuals.

At the time of the previous inspection, the inspectors asked leaders to set measurable targets in improvement plans to evaluate the progress pupils make. You have not fulfilled this. There are measurable targets for other areas requiring improvement, for example attendance, but not for how much progress pupils make. This makes it more challenging for governors to fully evaluate the actions of leaders. I have asked you and your team to include measurable targets for pupils' progress in your improvement planning. We also asked for governors to check that there is a clear link between teachers' pay and performance. Governors are aware of this link and challenge leaders to assure themselves that only good performance is rewarded.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were also asked to improve the quality of teaching to ensure that more pupils make rapid progress. Pupils are making good progress, particularly in English, throughout the school. Pupils' progress in mathematics is not as rapid in key stages 3 and 4 because they have shortcomings in their ability to reason and problem solve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The designated senior leaders for safeguarding carry out their roles effectively. They have a good knowledge of different services available to support pupils and their families. They liaise with families very well to ensure that the most appropriate

support is provided. If leaders are not satisfied with the response of external agencies, they will challenge decisions in the best interests of pupils. Leaders are experienced at leading multi-agency meetings to ensure that action is coordinated to keep pupils safe. The pupils' files are well maintained and securely stored.

The staff are well-trained in safeguarding. They know how to recognise the potential signs of abuse and how to report their concerns. Once a concern has been raised, leaders take swift action and record their response. All staff who responded to the staff survey agreed that pupils were safe in school. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The school takes effective action against incidents of homophobic or racist abuse. Staff work closely with parents to explain to pupils why these forms of abuse are wrong. The number of incidents involving racist and homophobic comments is very low.

In the previous academic year, the number of pupils who received a fixed-term exclusion rose. The school has monitored the incidents closely and reviewed procedures for dealing with poor behaviour to ensure a consistent approach between key stages 3 and 4. In the current academic year, the number of pupils who have received a fixed-term exclusion has almost halved. Similarly, the number of incidents which have required staff to physically restrain pupils has more than halved in the current academic year, compared to last year. The school is a calm environment and staff are accomplished at dealing with pupils' challenging behaviour. This helps to prevent some pupils' poor behaviour from escalating.

Pupils' attendance has risen in the current academic year. Last year, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent was above the national average for similar schools. You have taken decisive action to improve attendance this year. Parents are sent letters if a pupil's attendance is causing concern and you request medical notification for prolonged absences. In the current year, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is below last year's national average.

Inspection findings

- The key lines of enquiry for this inspection focused on leaders' ability to evaluate the school's work, and how effectively teachers are enabling pupils to make good progress, and promoting pupils' reading and mathematical skills.
- Leaders check pupils' progress closely in all areas of the curriculum. They discuss each pupil's progress three times a year with staff. If pupils are at risk of underachieving, extra support is put in place to enable them to catch up. The school's assessments show a large majority of pupils are making good progress in English and mathematics. Leaders use the pupil premium funding well to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils. The school's current assessment information shows that the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others have closed in nearly all areas of learning. The governing body is aware of the school's improved outcomes in English and mathematics at the end of key stages 4 and 5. However, the school improvement plan does not

contain measurable targets for pupils' progress. This makes it more difficult for governors to judge if the leaders' actions have been successful or not in ensuring that pupils and students are achieving well throughout the school.

- Teachers use texts and film clips to motivate pupils to write and to be creative. Pupils study the characters and the themes within the texts to gain a deeper understanding. For example, pupils who have more severe cognitive learning needs studied the animals from 'Charlotte's web' and matched sounds to the animals. Furthermore, pupils used marble ink to create impressive spiders' webs. Other pupils studied the film 'Gnomeo and Juliet'. One Year 7 pupil wrote, 'Love is caring and respecting each other.' Pupils punctuate their sentences well and use connectives to make their sentences more interesting.
- Pupils read fluently and demonstrate a good understanding of the texts they read. The school successfully uses a range of strategies to promote reading. Some pupils use braille, others use a reading pen to sound out words and some use their phonic knowledge to blend sounds and read words. Pupils also read with Connie the dog to add to their enjoyment of reading. Pupils told us how teachers help them to enjoy reading by promoting books which appeal to their interests.
- In mathematics, pupils cover a range of topics to develop their knowledge of mathematical concepts. In the sixth form, students use mathematics to solve problems in everyday life. However, in key stages 3 and 4 pupils are less proficient in reasoning or problem-solving. Pupils do not have a deep understanding of the concepts before they move onto the next area of the mathematics curriculum. Leaders have recognised this through their work scrutiny of pupils' work and intend to plan more training for the staff to help to improve pupils' mathematical achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in key stages 3 and 4 develop further their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics to gain a deeper understanding of concepts
- school improvement planning has measurable success criteria to enable governors to judge if actions taken by the school have been successful or not.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the principal and vice-principal, the head of sixth form, the trust's safeguarding and welfare officer, the school's designated lead for safeguarding, the coordinators for provision in English and science, the administration manager and small groups of teaching assistants and teachers. We observed learning throughout the school and reviewed pupils' work. We met with the acting chair and two other members of the governing body. We listened to pupils read and spoke with two groups of pupils. We reviewed records about keeping children safe and studied the school development plan and the school's self-evaluation. We reviewed the five parent responses to the Ofsted free-text service and the results from the school's parent survey in March 2018. We also reviewed the 23 responses to the staff survey.