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Miss Dawn White
Principal
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Dear Miss White

Short inspection of Sir Harry Smith Community College

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2018 with Vivien Corrie-Wing, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Sir Harry Smith Community College is a vibrant, welcoming and caring school, in which pupils enjoy their learning and feel valued. Pupils benefit from learning within a calm and productive classroom environment; they get to work quickly and maintain their focus, including when the work they are completing is challenging. Relationships are highly positive, which gives pupils the confidence to share their ideas or to ask for help if they are unsure of something.

Outside of the classroom, many pupils participate in the exceptionally rich range of cultural, musical and sporting activities that the school has to offer. Pupils often develop their interests to a high level, engaging in debating contests at the University of Cambridge, for example, or taking part in the 'Awesome Shakespeare' drama group. Many parents commented on, as one put it, the resulting 'development of pupils' life skills and the creation of positive and long-lasting memories'.

Staff ensure that pupils behave very well, both in the classroom and around the school. A high proportion of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that the school ensures that pupils are well behaved. Many parents also commented about the support and encouragement

their children receive; one parent noted: 'In the past year I have seen my daughter grow in confidence and take pride in her work. The school has developed her motivation and belief in herself. Now she works really hard to achieve.' Pupils who spoke with us made clear that, typically, teachers 'go the extra mile' to help them. This was consistent with other inspection evidence. As a result, most pupils make good progress and achieve public examination results that are at least in line with pupils with the same starting points nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, who attend the school's enhanced provision centre, typically make good progress because they are well supported.

Together with other leaders, including governors, you are rigorous in checking the quality of the school's work and determined in your pursuit of improvement. You identified that sometimes pupils did not make rapid enough progress in Year 7 because the work they completed lacked sufficient challenge. In response, you have enabled teachers to work closely with their colleagues in the local primary schools. This has helped them to plan activities that build on what pupils already know and can do by the time they finish key stage 2. These developments have enabled pupils to make a strong start to their secondary education.

You have continued to improve provision in the school's large and growing sixth form. Leaders and teachers are encouraging a sense of high ambition and aspiration among the students who attend it. In 2017, students' progress was strong in both their academic and vocational qualifications. The proportion of students who gained places at the country's most selective universities was above the national average. You work well to ensure that pupils are aware of the range of post-18 opportunities that are available, well before they join the sixth form. You help them to develop the confidence they need to aim high. Students benefit from access to mock interviews, visits to universities, and the chance to talk with former students who have been successful in higher education.

Governors share your commitment to provide the best education and fullest range of opportunities for pupils. Governors provide you with strong support and ask well-targeted questions. These, together with regular visits, develop governors' understanding of standards at the school, and hold leaders to account well. Their challenge helps to secure improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff, pupils and parents are rightly confident that pupils are well looked after at school. Leaders, including governors, have helped to create and sustain a culture in which pupils' safety is everyone's responsibility.

Staff benefit from regular training about safeguarding-related issues, which helps them to maintain a good understanding of the risks that pupils face and how they should act if they have concerns about an individual's welfare. Staff take notice of

changes in behaviour, appearance or patterns of attendance that might indicate a pupil to be vulnerable. Staff report any concerns promptly. You take prompt and appropriate action to promote pupils' safety, and work well with external agencies to secure their support when that is needed.

Pupils told us that they feel safe at school and enjoy their learning. They believe that staff typically deal with bullying effectively, and the school's monitoring records indicate that repeat incidents of bullying are rare.

Inspection findings

- Our first line of enquiry involved establishing the extent to which the most able make the progress that they should by the end of key stage 4. This was an area for improvement identified by the previous inspection report. You have focused upon increasing the opportunities that the most able have for personal development, through engaging them in activities outside of the classroom. The breadth of these is considerable. For example, pupils made clear that they particularly benefited from the events organised by The Brilliant Club, a non-profit organisation that seeks to widen access to university for students from under-represented groups.
- You have also worked to increase the extent to which the most able complete learning activities that develop their thinking and deepen their knowledge and understanding. You are setting high expectations in this respect. You are rightly checking how successfully teachers plan and implement sequences of learning that get the best out of the most able pupils. You are holding subject leaders to account effectively for standards in this regard.
- Many teachers ask the most able pupils questions that encourage them to think hard. Some teachers provide these pupils with more complex texts to read, and teach them how to research a topic carefully, using different sources of information. This helps to prepare key stage 4 pupils well for post-16 study. At GCSE, teachers typically provide very precise guidance to the most able pupils that helps them understand how best to apply what they know to the more demanding examination questions.
- The most able pupils typically complete suitably difficult work; this is particularly the case during key stage 4 and in English, history and mathematics. Pupils make good progress in these subjects, and in drama, physical education, sociology and psychology. Overall, by the end of key stage 4, the proportion of top grades awarded at GCSE is in line with the national average. The most able pupils typically make very good progress in the sixth form and achieve highly.
- Over time, teaching, learning and assessment have been less effective at meeting these pupils' needs within chemistry, geography and modern foreign languages, owing in part to staffing instability within these subjects. You acknowledge that overall, provision for the most able in history and geography is less effective at key stage 3 than it is at key stage 4.
- We also agreed to establish how far leaders have ensured that less-able pupils make good progress within mathematics and science. In 2017, these pupils made

too little progress in these subjects by the end of key stage 4. Unvalidated data indicates that the less able made better progress by the end of key stage 4 in 2018 in both subjects. This reflects additional help provided to pupils that supported them to diminish some of the differences in their knowledge and understanding. It also reflects improvements to teaching within mathematics. You acknowledge that there is still more to do to ensure that teaching is strong enough to prevent the less able from falling behind in the first place. Plans have been put in place that are beginning to address this.

- Leaders' improvement planning in science is not sharply focused enough upon the needs of the less able. As a result, some of these pupils do not do as well as they might. Too often, teachers do not check these pupils' knowledge and understanding carefully enough. This results in pupils' misconceptions not being identified or corrected. Teachers do not ensure that pupils' vocabulary is sufficiently well-developed in specific subjects. This prevents some pupils from applying their knowledge well and writing scientifically.
- Our final line of enquiry involved establishing how far pupils are making the progress that they should in humanities subjects. In 2016 and 2017, pupils made insufficient progress, particularly in geography and history, by the end of key stage 4. In 2018, pupils' progress and outcomes in both subjects improved. Subject leaders have ensured that pupils practise key skills more regularly so that these are better developed by the end of key stage 4. In history, this is helping pupils to evaluate better the utility and reliability of different sources of evidence, for example.
- You acknowledge that these improvements are most evident at key stage 4. In key stage 3, the extent to which activities and resources challenge the most able and support the less able remains too variable, particularly in geography. Although leaders are making the necessary changes to ensure that pupils make the same rapid progress as at key stage 4, it is too soon for the impact of this work to be fully evident.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils make the progress they should in chemistry, geography and modern foreign languages
- the less able gain secure knowledge and understanding in science, and develop their literacy skills effectively in different subjects
- all groups of pupils make good progress in the humanities at key stage 3.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, other senior and middle leaders, other school staff, governors, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and groups of pupils. Together with you and other leaders, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. We reviewed samples of pupils' work. We evaluated school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. We also considered the 66 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire from parents, alongside responses to the Ofsted staff and pupil surveys.