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Mr Graham Tate
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tate

Short inspection of Highfields School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2018 with Gwendoline Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, and David Hughes, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since becoming headteacher three years ago, you have built on the school's existing strengths and have seen teaching and outcomes improve further. Alongside your leadership team, you have created an inclusive ethos which supports pupils from a range of different backgrounds. Your belief that 'every child matters' is demonstrated in the high level of pastoral support given to pupils. In recent years, you have expanded your inclusion team so that pupils receive dedicated care and guidance which allows them to thrive in the classroom.

The school is calm and orderly with exemplary pupil behaviour. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a key strength of the school and help promote a strong culture of mutual respect. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and are proud to be members of its community. One parent, who responded to Parent View, summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'This is a fantastic school with superb facilities and great teachers.'

Staff were equally positive in their responses to the Ofsted inspection survey.

Outcomes for pupils have been consistently high for several years. Your focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has meant that pupils make substantial and sustained progress in the vast majority of subjects. Your leadership team has a strong understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school and has created a culture where staff routinely reflect on their own practice.

Governors are extremely passionate about the school. They speak proudly about the school's achievements and constantly strive for further improvement. The governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and provide strong challenge to the leadership team in how to enhance their performance further.

There remain some areas where there is room for further improvement. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is not as consistently strong as that of other pupils. In the sixth form, outcomes in some subjects are weaker than in others and non-qualification activity is not as well planned as other aspects of students' study programmes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a happy and harmonious atmosphere which puts safeguarding and pupil welfare at the heart of its core purpose. Staff know their pupils exceptionally well and understand their needs. Year managers work closely as a team and meet regularly to discuss concerns that are raised. Consequently, staff are swift in dealing with referrals using their strong links with external agencies to ensure that pupils get the right support.

Pupils feel well cared for at the school. When speaking with the inspection team, all pupils stated that they feel safe in all parts of the school and that bullying is very rare. They expressed great confidence in staff dealing with any problems they might face. The curriculum provides pupils with information on how to stay safe. For example, pupils are taught how to use the internet safely and its potential risks. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View said that pupils are safe in school, as did all staff who completed their inspection questionnaire.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders provide staff with regular training throughout the year. Consequently, staff have a strong understanding of safeguarding procedures. Child protection records are detailed, well organised and stored securely.

Inspection findings

- The inspection team firstly considered how well students performed in their 16-19 study programmes and how well the sixth form is led. Given their high starting points, students perform broadly in line with their peers nationally.
- However, progress varies somewhat between subjects and is a little weaker in

vocational subjects than it is in academic subjects. Students are given clear advice and guidance when selecting their programmes of study, and almost all students complete their courses. Your introduction of focused private study time for students in Year 12 has had a positive impact on the performance of students. You are quickly tackling the small number of subjects where progress is not as strong as others and monitoring the performance of students with increasing rigour.

- You have a clear understanding of the sixth form's strengths and areas for improvement. With the support of your leadership team, you are taking appropriate steps to support students with their study programmes. Leaders have a clear focus on improving students' progress. Students in the sixth form are extremely positive about their courses. They told the inspection team that they receive high levels of support with their studies and also with their applications to higher education and/or training.
- Most aspects of the sixth-form curriculum are well planned. However, leaders do not plan students' non-qualification activities, including work-related learning, as well as other areas of their study programmes. Consequently, some pupils do not benefit from activities which would contribute to their personal development as much as they should.
- The inspection team also considered the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school and the support given to disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. Pupils are keen and eager learners who engage fully with the learning in the classroom. As a result of strong relationships, pupils have become confident and resilient, showing a desire to succeed. Strong practice is evident across the school and inspectors observed exceptional practice in English, with highly effective questioning and routine checking of pupils' understanding and knowledge.
- As a result of the high priority given to literacy, pupils talk about their learning with confidence. They shared with inspectors how feedback from staff enables them to make progress and how they understand what they need to do to improve.
- Pupils use technology with increasing confidence to support their learning. Each pupil has their own laptop, which inspectors observed being used highly effectively, to aid teaching in the classroom. For example, pupils in a Year 7 science lesson enjoyed completing an online programme about photosynthesis.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have been consistently strong over a number of years. However, unvalidated GCSE results suggest that they declined somewhat in 2018. You are clear about the reasons for this, but you recognise that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils could be stronger in key stage 4. Your assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils currently in school are, once again, making at least good progress. Inspection evidence confirmed this to be the case.
- The inspection team's final area of focus was the school's curriculum. You and your leadership team have a clear vision and rationale for your curriculum. Extensive work has been undertaken to review the provision at key stage 3, to

ensure that pupils develop knowledge and understanding in a range of subjects. As a result, you have developed a highly engaging and personalised curriculum which meets the needs of learners in the school. For example, you have recently introduced dance at key stage 3 as a result of discussions with pupils. The curriculum is regularly reviewed in consultation with middle leaders, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of your pupils.

- Pupils who arrive at the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills follow a bespoke programme in order to help them catch up with their peers. Teachers are quick at identifying those pupils who require extra support and the impact of their intervention strategies are reviewed regularly. These pupils make strong progress as a result.
- The curriculum in key stage 4 provides pupils with considerable choice. This motivates and engages pupils extremely well. They enjoy their studies and achieve very well. The proportion of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate combination of subjects is below the national average. However, you are clear that pupils should not be coerced into taking subjects which they do not enjoy. You believe that your curriculum meets your pupils' needs successfully. Inspectors agree.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the sixth form improves by:
 - better planning students' non-qualification activity, including work-related learning
 - improving the progress that students make, especially in vocational subjects
- outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 are consistently as strong as those for other pupils in the school.

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 Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Howes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, members of the senior leadership team and seven governors, including the chair of the governing body.

We visited several classes with senior leaders, during which time we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. We scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, the school development plan and safeguarding and child protection records. Parents' views were considered through the 177 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including the 117 free-text comments. We also considered the 110 responses from members of staff to their online inspection questionnaire and the 1,106 responses to the pupil survey.