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Jonathan Osborn  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Osborn

### **Short inspection of The King Edmund School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 2018 with Caroline Parry and Vanessa Love, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 April 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 the previous inspection, you have highlighted some issues that you have had to address. Your focus has been on developing leadership at all levels. You have strengthened the school's leadership team through internal promotions and rearrangements, including the redeployment of your deputy head for teaching and learning to the pastoral deputy role. Senior leaders are honest and open about the school's strengths and areas for development. You have looked closely at why some of your progress figures remain below the national average and the reasons behind the dip in your unvalidated data for 2018, and action is being taken to address this. Similarly, your heads of the English, mathematics and science faculties talk candidly about what they do well and how they improve less effective areas. They acknowledge the challenges they have faced through curriculum changes and can explain their plans to develop pupils' writing stamina, mathematical curiosity and practical and investigative skills in science well.

Your pastoral team, behaviour for learning mentors and revised processes are improving pupils' behaviour. Staff emphasise the high standards you expect of pupils. Your programme to strengthen relationships between pupils and staff, called 'KESWAY', focuses on developing the respect agenda. The rewards system works, and pupils respond positively. As work in classes is planned more precisely

to meet pupils' needs, incidents of poor behaviour decline. Staff are positive about these new initiatives and can see the difference they make. Alongside this, the many trips, visits and occasions, such as the Remembrance Service, all serve to extend pupils' experiences and give them a sense of belonging. You continue to work hard to serve your community and your staff ensure that families receive the support they need.

The school's sixth form continues to meet the needs of its students well. You adapt your curriculum to ensure that you provide courses that students want. There is a good balance of academic and vocational subjects at level 2 and level 3. Leaders identify teaching and learning at post-16 as a strength. Evidence collected during the inspection supported that view. Additionally, students benefit from valuable careers advice, including internships, which gives them a good understanding of the range of opportunities that are available to them when they leave, including university, apprenticeships and college leaver programmes.

The governing body continues to support the school well. There are clear processes in place to ensure that they meet their statutory responsibilities linked to safeguarding. They work closely with school leaders and receive useful information on how to judge the school's effectiveness. They bring a range of experiences and skills to the role and are becoming increasingly effective in their analysis of data. Governors acknowledge, and this is borne out by governor minutes, that they need to build in more effective challenge on the impact of the school's work. Training is already in place to support this development.

Of the parents who responded to Parent View, most feel that their children are happy, and are both well taught and looked after. They highlight how hard staff work to support pupils and provide an inclusive, nurturing and enjoyable experience. They were particularly impressed by the learning support and extended services team, the pastoral team and the new focus on rewarding positive behaviour. Communication was praised by some of those who responded to the survey but criticised by others. You are aware of this and have taken action to address this over the past three years, including a half-termly newsletter, a bi-weekly parent bulletin, surgeries in the local community and by making all home-school communications electronic. There are a small minority of parents who responded to the survey who are less positive about the school, citing concerns they have around bullying, behaviour in class and the quality of teaching. Inspectors did not find any evidence to support these comments during the inspection. However, inspectors did see some inconsistencies in how well pupils learn across the school. The school's own extensive surveys to gain parents' views form a much larger sample collected over a longer period of time. These highlight that parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Staff feel well supported, they value the training they receive, and are proud to work at the school. As one said, 'This is a forward-thinking school where pupils enjoy their education.'

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, including governors, have helped to create a culture in which you all take responsibility for pupils' safety. Staff, pupils and parents feel that pupils are well looked after at school. Pupils told us that they feel safe at school and are taught how to stay safe, notably through some memorable drama productions that highlight some of the dangers they face, such as knife crime or social media.

Staff are aware of the new statutory guidance and can discuss practice and processes well. They are well trained on all aspects of safeguarding-related issues, and consequently have a clear understanding of their roles and the risks that pupils face. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any changes in their demeanour or attendance patterns that might indicate that a pupil could be vulnerable. Staff report any concerns promptly and the school's new online system helps coordinate responses to give a full picture of pupils' welfare.

## **Inspection findings**

- Our first line of enquiry was to find out whether the most able pupils make the progress that they should. The previous inspection report highlighted that these pupils need to be challenged more effectively so that they reach the highest grades in GCSE examinations. Leaders had also identified this as an area for improvement in their school development plan.
- You realise that teaching needs to go beyond simply knowing the processes. Pupils need to develop a better understanding of what they are learning. Your Thinking Schools and ACE programmes help pupils to analyse, compare and evaluate more successfully and develop their critical thinking skills. Your year 11 one-to-one mentoring and key stage 3 Rising Futures programme are encouraging pupils to aim higher and become more independent learners.
- You know what needs to be done, but it is too early to see the impact of many of your actions. Some teachers set stretch questions and critical thinking tasks to challenge pupils. However, not enough teachers routinely set work that challenges most-able pupils. The school's own information shows that current pupils are generally making expected progress. Progress is not yet consistently above expected levels for different subjects and year groups.
- Our next line of enquiry was to find out whether leaders use additional government funding effectively to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils. The published data from 2016 and 2017, and the unvalidated data from 2018, show that disadvantaged pupils made insufficient progress by the end of key stage 4.
- You identify the things that prevent disadvantaged pupils from learning and provide targeted support to help them. Your analysis tells you that your small-group focused teaching has been most effective. However, you know that some pupils' weak reading and writing skills still hamper their progress.
- Your action plan, increased work with parents and greater collaboration with feeder primary schools are addressing these issues. Your support to help pupils

build resilience has been introduced lower down the school. As current pupils' progress improves, you feel that this will filter through to results at the end of key stage 4. This is still a major priority for the school.

- Our final line of enquiry was to establish whether behaviour, attendance and welfare are good. Pupils' attendance had been below the national average for the last three years and there was a qualifying complaint linked to behaviour.
- Most pupils say that they enjoy school, that teachers help them to do their best and they know an adult to talk to if they have any concerns. Pupils feel the Bully Council and heads of year deal with any issues quickly and effectively. Pupils believe that everyone has the right to feel comfortable. As one pupil said, 'Many of us have different backgrounds, but all are welcomed, and we get on well.'
- Throughout the inspection, we did not see any incidents of poor behaviour. Inspectors found that there were no wider concerns linked to the qualifying complaint. Pupils moved around the site sensibly, were polite, got on with each other well and listened to what staff had to say. Pupils value highly the rewards system and feel it helps them to behave well. The school's monitoring records indicate that the incidents of poor behaviour are decreasing.
- Despite introducing a range of initiatives to improve attendance, including greater rewards for pupils who have good attendance, the overall figure remains below the national average. The increased focus from both pastoral and teaching staff, as well as the close work with parents to highlight the link between attendance and achievements, is starting to show improvements. However, the improvements are small, and they need to be both sustained and increased over time.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- you continue to support pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, by developing their literacy skills and building their resilience so that their progress at least matches that of other pupils nationally
- teachers plan work more precisely so that it challenges all pupils, especially most-able pupils, more effectively, helping them to make the progress they should
- you continue your work to help pupils attend more often so that your attendance figure is at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

John Randall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we met with you, and some of your other senior and middle leaders, governors, staff and three groups of pupils. We also held telephone conversations with a representative from the local authority and staff from alternative providers. We observed a wide range of lessons to see pupils at work. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation and development planning, safeguarding including the single central record, and attendance and behaviour records. We considered the 70 staff responses and the 126 pupil responses to the online surveys. We also considered the 93 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 84 free-text comments.