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Mr Bob Hamlyn
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hamlyn

Short inspection of Wanstead High School

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019 with Ofsted Inspectors Joanna Jones and Terry Millar, 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 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your inclusive approach and attention to pupils' well-being are held in high regard by pupils, parents, carers and staff. With support from the senior leadership team, you have ensured that the school continues to be a positive learning environment where pupils are well cared for. Governors provide effective support and challenge to the school. A strong sense of pride in the school's inclusive ethos permeates the whole school community.

You and your senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's current performance. Since the previous inspection, leaders have put in place effective strategies to improve teaching. For example, teachers now use questioning and feedback more consistently to deal with pupils' misconceptions. The presentation of work in pupils' books reflects teachers' high expectations. English, mathematics and humanities subjects have continued to demonstrate strong outcomes. However, you recognise that there is still variation in performance between different subjects, and this remains a key focus for school leaders.

Staff morale is high. Middle leaders, who are a strength of the school, demonstrate enthusiasm and ambition to do the very best they can to improve pupils' outcomes. Teachers who are new to the school speak very highly of the level of support they

receive. Similarly, teachers who are new to the profession or in training value their professional development.

The vast majority of pupils who met with inspectors said they were well supported in their academic and wider needs. Pupils value greatly the range of extra-curricular opportunities provided for them. For example, they spoke warmly about the drama and music productions.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records of checks on employees, governors and volunteers are carefully recorded and up to date. Staff are aware of their safeguarding duties and clear about how to follow up any concerns or issues. Governors monitor regularly the school's safeguarding systems and understand their statutory responsibilities. Staff and governors are fully aware of local risks, and leaders work effectively in partnership with other agencies to mitigate these.

Pupils learn how to keep safe from harm and how to manage risks. They value the wide range of activities to support their well-being, particularly assemblies on knife crime and road safety. They spoke positively about the 'kindness project', which rewards positive behaviour. Pupils feel listened to and say they know who to talk to if they have a concern. The majority of parents and pupils who completed the online surveys would recommend the school to others. One parent wrote to the inspection team personally to say, 'Wanstead High School and its staff are doing a very good job on a day-to-day basis to make a difference.'

Inspection findings

- We first agreed to look at how leaders have ensured that the curriculum promotes strong progress and outcomes for all groups of pupils. This is because of variability in subject examination results for the last two years, and the possibility that some pupils did not take the most appropriate courses.
- Leaders review the design and implementation of the curriculum regularly to ensure that it meets all pupils' needs. The curriculum includes a wide range of courses and offers breadth of choice. The school provides effective information, advice and guidance for pupils and parents, with a clear focus on successful progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. Pupils told inspectors that they valued the support from their teachers when deciding what 'free choice' GCSE subjects to study in key stage 4.
- Even so, it is evident that the courses chosen by some pupils in the past contributed to lower grades than should have been expected. Additionally, a lower proportion of pupils than found nationally chose to study a modern foreign language, including some with high prior attainment. Rightly, it remains a school priority to provide accurate information and the best advice to pupils in making

course choices. For example, this year, all Year 9 pupils will receive personal careers interviews as part of the guidance process.

- Another factor which has contributed to variability in performance – as acknowledged by school leaders – was weaker provision in subjects such as media studies, sociology and business. A range of actions have been taken to raise performance in these subject areas as pupils work towards the 2019 GCSE examinations. The school's assessment information suggests that these actions are beginning to make an impact.
- We next agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's strategies for improving provision and outcomes in science. This is because the progress made by pupils in science in the last two years was below that in other subjects.
- Leaders had identified that outcomes in science needed to be improved and took appropriate actions with regard to staffing and to improve teaching and learning. There is evidence of the impact of these actions in key stage 4 and the sixth form, where the quality of science teaching is stronger. In key stage 3, visits to classrooms and pupils' work in books show inconsistencies in practice, including in curriculum planning. As a consequence, pupils are not gaining the grounding in science that they need as preparation for GCSE study.
- Finally, we considered how school leaders have ensured that good-quality teaching meets the needs of all learners, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the most able pupils. This is because – in the past – pupils with SEND have not made the same progress as other pupils. Additionally, 2018 GCSE outcomes showed a decline in the progress made by pupils who had entered the school with high prior attainment.
- Inspectors saw strong practice in English and mathematics. Pupils across the range of attainment showed commitment to improving their work in response to teachers' guidance. Consequently, pupils from all starting points make strong progress in English and mathematics. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, for example, the most able pupils used subject terminology confidently, applying different methods to solving problems and so deepening their understanding.
- In a range of subjects, effective use was made of questioning to provide both support and challenge to pupils. This was particularly successful in identifying pupils' misconceptions and providing the necessary explanation or support to improve pupils' understanding. For example, in modern foreign language lessons, pupils from different starting points were challenged appropriately by their teachers to think about how to extend their responses.
- The leadership of pupils with SEND is now stronger than in the past. These pupils are well supported and, as a result, are making improved progress.
- However, it remains the case that some pupils with high prior attainment are not provided with consistent challenge to enable them to reach their potential. The school's own assessment information shows that – within a broadly improving picture – their progress is not as strong as that of middle- and lower-attaining pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the improvement strategies in science are consolidated – particularly in key stage 3 – to provide a stronger foundation for further study
- they build on the strong practice which exists in the school so that the most able pupils are consistently challenged.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Maguire
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspection team met with you and your senior leaders. We also met with two school governors and a group of middle leaders, as well as leaders with specific responsibilities. Inspectors met with two groups of staff and two groups of pupils from different year groups. There were 92 responses to Parent View – Ofsted's online survey for parents – and 47 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. We also took account of 40 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. Inspectors visited a range of classrooms in key stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form – sometimes accompanied by senior leaders – to observe learning and look at pupils' work. We also examined a further selection of pupils' work. Inspectors evaluated a range of school documentation relating to safeguarding, teaching, learning and assessment and school improvement planning and evaluation. We considered the school's own data on current and projected academic performance.