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Mr J Mortimer and Mr S Farar
Executive Principals
Hamstead Hall Academy
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Dear Mr Mortimer and Mr Farar

Short inspection of Hamstead Hall Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019 with Julie Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, and Peter Bassett, 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 January 2016.

This school continues to be good.

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

Together with the leadership team you ensure that pupils receive a high-quality learning experience. Your school's mission statement, 'Success for all through hard work and harmony', is evident in the conduct of pupils both in and out of the classroom. You have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have made changes to your leadership team so that further improvements can be made.

The school is calm and orderly and there is a strong relationship between staff and pupils. You are proud of the school's diversity, and leaders work hard to create a harmonious and productive learning environment. The majority of parents and carers are positive about the school and are supportive of the work that you do. One parent, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said: 'We are very impressed at the pastoral support the school offers and this is one of the main things that led us to send our sons to the school.'

Overall outcomes for pupils have dipped since the previous inspection. In response, leaders have taken effective action to improve areas of underperformance. Your current assessment data shows that pupils are making better progress and this was confirmed when inspectors observed lessons and looked at work in pupils' books.

The leadership team has a good understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders share existing strengths, for instance in mathematics, with other middle leaders to help them improve their practice. You recognise that pupils' prior attainment at the end of key stage 2 is well below national averages in reading and writing. You have introduced effective programmes of support in Year 7 so that pupils who need to can catch up with their peers.

Governors are proud of the school and the contribution it makes to the local community. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require improvement. Information that is shared with the governing body allows them to provide both support and challenge to school leaders.

You have made progress on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Departmental reviews have enabled you to identify areas of weakness in particular subjects and take swift and decisive steps. Your actions in subjects such as history are ensuring that pupils are able to make better progress.

Leaders are not yet fully evaluating whether new policies and procedures bring about the intended improvements in pupils' outcomes. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has not been strong enough in recent years and needs to be improved. Furthermore, some pupils with SEND are absent from school too frequently.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school provides a safe and supportive environment for pupils. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and understand how to report concerns. Pastoral staff have a strong understanding of the issues affecting the school's most vulnerable pupils and are swift to contact external agencies if they require additional support.

Pupils are well cared for at the school. When speaking with inspectors, pupils were keen to emphasise the positive relationships they have with staff. While incidents of bullying and harassment are rare, pupils are clear where they can report this and have confidence in staff being able to resolve issues that arise. The school curriculum teaches pupils how to help keep themselves safe. During personal, social and health education days, for instance, pupils are taught about the dangers of knife crime.

Leaders ensure that all documentation relating to safeguarding is up to date and fit for purpose. Records relating to vulnerable pupils are well organised and stored securely.

Inspection findings

- The first area the inspection team considered was the actions leaders have taken to improve progress in key stage 4, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Outcomes for these pupils have been historically below the national average in a number of subjects. You have taken decisive action to

improve this underperformance with changes to your leadership team and an extensive professional development programme for staff. Your assessment data shows that these pupils are now making better progress. However, this improved progress is not consistent across all subjects.

- Leaders have a strong knowledge of pupils with SEND. Your SEND resource base is used effectively to support pupils and provide appropriate interventions. As a result, the progress of current pupils with SEND is similar to that of their peers. Leaders are not doing enough to improve the attendance for pupils with SEND and, as a result, absence remains too high for this group of pupils.
- You have also introduced new strategies to improve the progress of all pupils across the school. Your focus on developing pupils' academic language was seen by inspectors to work successfully in a number of lessons. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, pupils completing a 'reading to learn' activity were able to discuss numerical terms with increasing confidence. The leadership team has also introduced a 'challenge for all' programme to raise teachers' expectations. However, leaders need to evaluate the effect of new policies and procedures, such as this programme, thoroughly to ensure that they improve pupils' outcomes.
- The inspection team also considered what actions leaders were taking to improve outcomes for students in their 16 to 19 programmes and how well the sixth form is led. The sixth form provides a broad choice of subjects for an increasing number of students. Your inclusive approach means that pupils are well supported in choosing academic or vocational pathways. Leaders ensure that the sixth form provides students with strong non-qualification activities and relevant work experience.
- Sixth form students feel well supported, both academically and pastorally. They told the inspection team that they value the careers advice and support they are given with UCAS applications.
- There were previous weaknesses in the way targets were set for sixth form students, and leaders have made changes to help monitor and evaluate the 16 to 19 programmes more effectively. Your assessment data shows that there has been improvement in students' progress in a number of subjects.
- The final area the inspection team considered was the school's curriculum and how it ensures that pupils make good progress. Historically, leaders did not respond quickly enough to the changes at key stage 4 and pupils were not as well prepared as they could have been for the demands of their courses. However, there has been a more positive recent response and the curriculum is developing well.
- Middle leaders have a clear understanding of the school's priorities and have now shaped their curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils. There is a focus on developing pupils' knowledge and skills at key stage 3 to help them make better progress in key stage 4 and this was evident in lessons seen by inspectors. Teachers now routinely share best practice across departments and are working on effective cross-curricular themes.
- The curriculum at key stage 4 allows pupils to take a wide variety of subjects.

Leaders ensure that pupils are given appropriate advice to select subjects that are suitable for their ability. The proportion of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate combination of subjects is above the national average. You are clear that all pupils should have access to a high-quality curriculum so that they develop the skills and knowledge needed to access further education and/or training.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment rigorously to ensure that new policies and procedures bring about the intended improvements in pupils' outcomes
- outcomes improve at key stage 4, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
- the attendance of pupils with SEND improves.

I am copying this letter to the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. 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 three governors, including the chair of the governing body. They also spoke with the chair of directors of the Hamstead Hall Academy Trust.

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 19 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 15 free-text comments.