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Mr Mark Farmer
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Dear Mr Farmer

Short inspection of Moulsham High School

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019 with Kay Leach and Caroline Pardy, 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 second short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

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. However, the school segregates its pupils by sex for some groups across Years 7 and 8, and its rationale for this policy does not amount to positive action under section 158 of the Equality Act 2010. Although plans are in place to eliminate segregation in September 2019, Ofsted is clear that a school operating unlawful segregation cannot be good or outstanding.

In light of the findings from this visit, 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.**

You, the head of school and other senior colleagues have led the school with energy, consistency and determination to help the school live up to its stated commitment to ensure that all pupils and staff 'enjoy, enrich, achieve'. You have created a culture of very high expectations that every pupil can succeed. You have ensured that these aspirations have been articulated with clarity and, as a result, they have been translated into strong achievement. Pupils make overall progress on average which is consistently well above that made by pupils on average nationally. You have achieved this by creating a community of mutual respect in which leaders at all levels, teachers, pupils and parents collaborate positively to secure improvement.

Teachers ensure that pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour and develop

exemplary attitudes to learning. This means that pupils conduct themselves very well at school. They are polite and courteous to adults, and each other. They move around the site in a calm and orderly fashion and treat their facilities with care and consideration. They attend extremely regularly and arrive punctually. It also means that they engage positively with their learning, ask questions when they are unclear, venture answers without worrying if they are wrong and develop impressive research and independent learning skills. The school ensures that pupils develop into confident and articulate young people.

The school has improved notably since the previous inspection. You have successfully embedded strategies for ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make strong progress. You have effectively combined high-quality teaching in lessons with appropriately targeted support and intervention outside the classroom. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make stronger progress than that made by non-disadvantaged pupils on average nationally. Your support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has also strengthened and these pupils make progress in line with others with similar starting points.

You have continued to improve the performance of boys, and the difference between the progress boys make and that made by girls is considerably smaller than that found on average nationally.

School leaders at all levels, including trustees and members of the local governing body, are not complacent. They acknowledge that there is still some variability in the quality of teaching and achievement between different subjects and key stages, and they are determined to ensure that all pupils make equally strong progress

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, ensure that protecting pupils and keeping them safe is a fundamental priority for everyone at Moulsham High School. This has contributed to a thorough and vigilant culture of safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, are understood by all staff, and that records are detailed and of high quality. All staff understand their responsibility for ensuring the safety and welfare of those who are vulnerable or at risk. All staff have had relevant training, and this is regularly updated.

Pupils state they feel safe at the school. This is strongly supported by the views of parents and staff. The curriculum helps pupils to deal with any risks they may face as they grow up, including those encountered using the internet and social networking sites. Pupils are confident that any poor behaviour at school, including bullying, is dealt with effectively if it does occur. Staff are quick in identifying any concerns that they have about pupils and always follow them up with due urgency. They liaise effectively with external agencies so that pupils get the support that they require in a timely fashion. Information is shared effectively with parents and carers, and staff develop constructive working relationships with other agencies which help to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school has strengthened its provision for pupils who join the school with high prior attainment. This is because the previous inspection report challenged the school to ensure that a greater proportion of those pupils who could attain the highest grades did so, across the full range of their GCSE examinations. The school has clearly identified this issue in its development planning and has introduced a range of measures to improve the progress of these pupils. It has been a focus for staff training within the school's professional development programme.
- Evidence from this inspection shows that the school now routinely provides suitable challenge for its most-able pupils. This priority is embedded in the curriculum planning of individual subject departments and teachers structure lessons so they stretch all pupils, including the most able, from the outset. This means they do not have to undertake tasks which are too easy for them before they are faced with work of the right level. Since the previous inspection, pupils who have joined the school with high prior attainment have made progress which is well above that made by similar pupils nationally, and the most able pupils in the school continue to make strong progress.
- My second line of enquiry was to explore how effectively the school teaches modern British values. This was an area of the curriculum that the previous inspection report indicated needed strengthening further. Since that inspection, the school has introduced discrete citizenship lessons, enhanced the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum, sharpened the tutorial programme and mapped where the teaching of important themes such as democracy, tolerance and the threat of extremism are part of subject teaching.
- The teaching of modern British values is now a strength of the school. The range of strategies introduced has ensured that pupils in all key stages can discuss these issues articulately and sensitively. The teaching in humanities is particularly effective and this allows pupils to understand relevant issues within their historical and global contexts. Pupils not only understand these values, but exhibit them in how they interact with others. As a result, the school is an extremely tolerant and inclusive community where diversity is celebrated.
- I also wanted to investigate how successfully the school is working to ensure consistently excellent progress across all subject areas. This is because although overall progress, and the progress made in a large majority of subject areas, has been well above that made nationally at key stage 4, it has not been so strong in a very small number of subject areas, including modern foreign languages and design and technology.
- The school has acted decisively to strengthen progress in these subjects. There have been relevant changes in leadership, and appropriate training has been put in place. The nature of the curriculum and the examination courses offered have been reviewed and adapted. As a result, the rate of progress that pupils make in these departments is improving towards that made in the most successful subjects.

- In mathematics, pupils have consistently made better progress than pupils have made on average nationally at key stage 4. However, school leaders are very conscious that pupils have not made the same extremely high levels of progress they make in English and science. School leaders have restructured the key stage 3 curriculum to enhance pupils' conceptual understanding and to strengthen their problem-solving skills. Consequently, pupils are now making much stronger progress in mathematics in key stage 3.
- My final line of enquiry was to explore achievement and teaching in the sixth form. This is because, although A-level students made overall progress that was significantly above the national average in 2017, in 2018 this progress declined to be in line with that made by students nationally. School leaders have acted with appropriate urgency to ensure that the school's procedures for monitoring the quality of education in the sixth form are highly effective.
- Evidence from this inspection shows that teaching in the sixth form is typically of a high standard. Students maintain exceedingly thorough and well-organised records of their learning. Teachers plan interesting and engaging lessons which motivate students, and this leads to strong progress in almost all subjects. Teachers ensure that students know how to improve their work and students routinely act upon this advice.
- The relatively small number of students following applied general courses do not receive such consistently strong teaching. Some of these courses have not always been taught by specialist staff and this has limited progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010
- the progress made by pupils in mathematics at key stage 4 is consistently well above the national average
- the quality of teaching in applied general subjects at key stage 5 is strengthened further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Bridge Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, the head of school, other school leaders, teachers, trustees, governors, a representative of the local authority and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team. We scrutinised a range of school documentation including: policies; the school's self-evaluation; the school's improvement plan; safeguarding records and information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. We considered the views expressed in 235 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 225 free-text responses, together with 225 questionnaires returned by pupils and 65 returned by school staff.