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Mr Paul Shone
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shone

Short inspection of Holly Lodge High School College of Science

Following my visit to the school on 14 February 2017 with Robert Bourdon-Pierre, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You took on the role of headteacher in September 2015 and there have been a number of other staff changes on the leadership team since that time. You and your leadership team are fully committed to creating a culture of continuous school improvement and accept that there are still a number of improvements to be made in the school. You agree that your quality assurance procedures need to be more rigorously applied to ensure that all weaknesses are quickly picked up and dealt with. Staff told us that leaders encourage, challenge and support them to improve through good opportunities for professional development.

Your governing body is proud of the work the school is doing for the local community. The school has welcomed a considerable number of pupils who are newly arrived in the UK and are providing good support to help them develop English language skills and an understanding of British values. You are making changes that have improved the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, although you recognise that their attendance is still too low. You keep governors well informed about the school and that enables them to provide challenge to you and senior leaders in meetings of the governing body.

Your pupils were well behaved in the lessons we visited and generally engaged enthusiastically with their learning, and our other evidence confirms that this is typical. Pupils were keen to talk to us about their school.

They were polite and courteous to each other around the school site and were orderly when queuing for food at lunch- and breaktimes, despite fairly limited facilities for such a large number of pupils.

You have made considerable progress against the issues identified at the last inspection. Teachers have had a lot of support in developing more challenging teaching activities for the most able pupils and the impact of this was evident in the lessons we visited and in pupils' books. However, you agree with us that teachers could continue to raise their expectations for the most able pupils and include more challenging activities for the middle- and lower ability pupils. GCSE results in mathematics have improved and all groups of pupils are making better progress in mathematics.

Since the last inspection, students are making better progress in the sixth form across a wide range of subjects. Following the advice in the previous inspection report, they now have increased opportunities to participate in the wider life of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, take their responsibilities for safeguarding very seriously. They have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are suitably detailed. Governors are adamant that the school must be a safe haven for all pupils. They have received safeguarding training across a range of areas, including the safe recruitment of staff and strategies to keep pupils safe from the risks of extremism. Safeguarding is regularly discussed at governing body meetings.

A small team that includes pastoral leaders and the school's attendance manager works closely to support vulnerable pupils. The curriculum includes numerous opportunities to improve pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. In a Year 8 assembly that took place during the inspection, pupils were able to clearly articulate how to keep themselves safe online and showed confidence in talking in front of their year group. Positive features of the wider school culture were evident in the warm applause pupils gave to peers who had successfully achieved reading certificates and mathematics prizes.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, the overall progress of Year 11 pupils at the school was in line with national levels. Pupils made significantly better progress than others nationally in languages and humanities. Pupils made less progress in resistant materials, religious studies and art. Leaders have taken appropriate steps to improve outcomes in these underperforming subjects this year. Staff have received additional training and external moderation processes are in place to ensure that teacher assessment is accurate. Some impact from these changes is evident but it is too early to see whether these actions will lead to improved GCSE outcomes.

- There is a coherently planned quality assurance programme in place throughout the school year to help deliver greater consistency across departments. Teaching is regularly observed and used alongside book reviews and assessment tracking to identify departments in need of support. The most effective departments share strategies with others and this has led to some successes. For example, improvements in leadership, teaching and learning in languages have led to better examination results. However, inconsistencies still exist between subject areas. The school's quality assurance arrangements have not always quickly identified where teachers are not following agreed policies, such as the school's policy on feedback to pupils. As a result, some weaker practice has gone unchallenged by leaders.
- Mathematics was identified as a key underperforming area at the last inspection. Since then, the actions taken by leaders to improve the leadership of mathematics, strategies and training to support better teaching and very careful tracking and intervention for pupils falling behind have led to significant improvement. In 2016, pupils made progress in mathematics in line with their peers nationally.
- Developing stretch and challenge in learning has been a major focus for your staff training this year. We saw good evidence of the use of these strategies in some lessons during the inspection, including in English and in the sixth form, and evidence that this is increasingly typical. Pupils were given opportunities to answer challenging questions and undertake some thought-provoking tasks. However, these examples were generally focused on most-able pupils and opportunities were missed to adopt similarly demanding strategies with all ability groups. Leaders' systematic tracking of the performance of groups of pupils by their prior attainment is not as sharp as it is for other pupil groups. Improvements in this would help ensure that all pupils are making good progress and lower- and middle-attaining pupils would be identified as in need of further support and challenge.
- In the 2016 GCSE examinations, disadvantaged pupils performed significantly less well than others pupils nationally. In the light of this, leaders changed their strategies on spending the additional funding provided by the government to support disadvantaged students. Specialist learning coaches in English, mathematics and science are now used to provide sharply focused, subject-specific support for disadvantaged students who fall behind in these areas. Internal, moderated school tracking information for current pupils shows that this approach is leading to more rapid progress for these pupils and in Year 11, disadvantaged pupils are making the same progress as their peers.
- Disadvantaged pupils, however, attend school less regularly than others in the school and nationally. Additional resources have been provided, including home visits and the support of a mentor, and as a result some pupils now attend more regularly. Despite this support, the overall attendance for disadvantaged pupils has not improved this year and leaders will need to carefully evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken so far, making changes as necessary.

- Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been reviewed following the appointment of a new leader in this area. The coordinator for this area works well with teachers to provide bespoke support, including help to promote life skills. Some pupils have a modified timetable, while others receive targeted support in lessons from well-trained support staff. A significant number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also newly arrived to the school and receive well-targeted additional support to help them to speak English.
- The leader of the sixth form understands the concerns that were raised in the previous inspection report and has taken rapid action to improve outcomes and the engagement of sixth-form students. They make good progress in applied general qualifications and performance is improving across the great majority of A-level courses. Courses with poor outcomes have been removed from the curriculum and replaced with courses that are more relevant to, and suitably challenging for, Holly Lodge students.
- Students in the sixth form now have opportunities to support younger pupils through a 'reluctant readers' programme, charity fund-raising and sports coaching. They also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Combined Cadet Force, lead sessions of the school council, and act as tour guides for visitors.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils in attending school more regularly are effective
- teachers provide challenging learning activities for pupils of all abilities and are supported to track more carefully the progress of pupils against their prior attainment
- quality assurance processes are adapted and strengthened to ensure that they identify weaknesses in performance and lead to rapid remedial action where necessary, thereby reducing inconsistencies between subject areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your senior team and members of the governing body. We also met with a number of other staff, including the special educational needs coordinator, attendance support and the head of the sixth form. We scrutinised documents, including minutes of governing body meetings, safeguarding policies, analysis of pupils' achievement and attendance records. We visited lessons in all year groups and across a wide range of subjects to observe learning and we looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We spoke to pupils in lessons and around the school and observed pupils at break- and lunchtime. We took account of the 40 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and considered the 59 staff and 60 pupil responses to the Ofsted survey.

At our initial meeting we agreed to focus on the following areas during this inspection:

- the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- the variation in performance of different subjects
- the actions taken to improve achievement and engagement in the sixth form
- the effectiveness of safeguarding
- the challenge provided to most-able pupils in lessons.