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Mrs Caroline Saxelby
Walton Girls' High School and Sixth Form
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Dear Mrs Saxelby

Short inspection of Walton Girls' High School and Sixth Form

Following my visit to the academy on 21 October 2015 with Amanda Carter-Fraser, HMI, 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 academy was judged to be good in April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. You and your team continue to have high expectations of your staff and pupils. You also provide effective care and support for your pupils. As a consequence, pupils achieve well, particularly at Key Stage 4, and behaviour and attendance remain key strengths of the academy.

Further improvement to the quality of teaching is at the centre of the academy's work. You, your senior leaders and subject leaders conduct regular observations of teaching, check the quality of pupils' work in their books and the quality of teachers' feedback. This provides you with a clear view of where the best practice is happening, and where further support may be required. Teachers are keen to sharpen their own practice in the classroom. To this end, they readily engage in opportunities to observe each other teach, share best practice with each other and engage in whole-staff training which is focused on teaching and learning. The staff at the academy are also working with other local schools in order to widen their experience of teaching practice. You and your team provide effective support to staff whose performance is below expectations.

Pupils enjoy their time at the academy. This is reflected not only in the attendance rates, which are above the national average, but also in the positive atmosphere around the academy. This is evident both in lessons and around the academy site during social times. In one lesson, for example, pupils hummed along to an adapted nursery rhyme to remind them of how to calculate the area of a trapezium, and tackled increasingly complicated questions. They expressed spontaneous delight when they got the answer correct. Pupils move calmly around the academy site and show respect towards each other and towards adults. Those spoken to informally by

inspectors during breaks and formally in meetings all said they enjoy coming to the academy and value the opportunities the academy offers them. They spoke highly of the support they receive from their teachers, their form tutors and the learning mentors.

You recognise that behaviour is good, but you are not complacent about this. You and your leaders communicate clearly your expectations for good behaviour and appropriate attitudes to learning. The academy has a system of achievement points and behaviour points which underpins these expectations. The inter-house competitiveness over gaining achievement points provides pupils with a clear focus to ensure that they adopt the correct attitudes to their learning. Further, leaders regularly monitor the awarding of achievement and behaviour points to ensure that this system maintains its credibility with pupils, and reinforces positive attitudes to learning. Parents acknowledge this strong focus on behaviour. Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that behaviour at the academy is good.

At the previous inspection, inspectors praised the academy for the wide range of experiences and opportunities from which pupils benefit. They identified this as encouraging excellent attitudes to learning and behaviour. This is still the case.

At that time inspectors also identified several key areas for improvement:

- that teachers should ensure that the work they set matched pupils' differing needs more closely
- that pupils required clearer guidance on exactly how to improve their work
- that achievement in English and mathematics, although improving, was not as strong as that in many other subjects.

The leadership team has taken effective action to tackle these areas. You and your team have developed a robust system for entering information about how well pupils are doing, to ensure that this information is accurate. As a consequence, you are able to provide earlier intervention for those pupils who are falling behind. Teachers receive information about pupils' achievement in order to help them plan appropriate activities for their pupils. This has had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

You have introduced a consistent approach to the feedback teachers provide pupils when marking their work. Pupils are given time to respond to teachers' comments. Those pupils inspectors spoke to said that they value these occasions as they provide them with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and improve their understanding. This has been particularly successful in improving achievement in English.

You have rightly acted on your knowledge that pupils' outcomes in mathematics is an area that requires attention. You have appointed a new subject leader and deputy leader in mathematics and ensured that all teachers of mathematics are specialist teachers so that all mathematics lessons are now taught by dedicated mathematics specialists. As a result of these actions, there has been an

improvement in the progress current pupils are making in mathematics across all year groups. Further work is required to build on these recent improvements. This includes building on the links between the science and mathematics departments to raise achievement in mathematics, and ensuring that mathematics teachers plan activities which meet the needs of all pupils.

Achievement in the vocational subjects in the sixth form is very good. Pupils' outcomes in academic courses, however, reflect some underperformance. You have rightly identified this as a priority for your academy. You have taken action which is already having a positive impact. You have:

- appointed more form tutors in order to support the sixth form pupils
- provided additional mathematics lessons to support pupils studying science
- ensured that sixth form achievement is a key focus for discussions between subject leaders and senior leaders.

As a consequence of these actions, you are able to demonstrate that there is an improvement in the rates of progress being made by current sixth form pupils taking academic subjects. Further work is required to sustain this increase in the rates of pupils' achievement in these subjects, particularly in ensuring that teachers provide appropriate support to pupils where it is needed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team take your responsibilities for keeping pupils safe very seriously. There is a strong staff presence at break, at lunchtime and after the academy day, to supervise and support pupils. Members of staff on duty are easily identified as they wear special high-visibility jackets. As a result, pupils are well aware of whom they can go to if they need to. Pupils say that they feel that they can share any concerns that they have. Those spoken to by inspectors were confident that, should they speak to a member of staff, they will be taken seriously and the issue will be dealt with.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive safeguarding training at the beginning of the academic year and are aware of how to report concerns. Leaders who have direct responsibility for safeguarding work well together in providing personalised support for pupils. Leaders are persistent in following up concerns, communicating with parents and working with outside agencies. One leader has recently received training on preventing radicalisation and extremism, and the academy has planned training for all staff on this key issue.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas which need further development. Senior leaders, governors and subject leaders are involved in self-evaluation and agreeing future actions. Improvement plans written by subject areas feed into the whole academy improvement plan. All members of staff understand the academy's key priorities.
- Governors ask challenging questions of leaders. They are tenacious in ensuring that leaders provide them with accurate information so that governors have an exact view of the academy's provision and its overall effectiveness. Governors are aware of the need to improve pupils' outcomes in the academic subjects in the sixth form. They are currently reviewing provision in this area of the academy to ensure that recent improvements are sustained. They are also aware of the academy's priority to raise achievement in mathematics.
- Leaders have developed a more accurate system for checking pupils' progress. Teachers check each other's assessment of pupils' work to ensure that the process is accurate. Achievement information is used by subject leaders to identify where pupils are falling behind, and support is provided where it is needed. This is having a clear positive impact upon current pupils' progress.
- There is a strong focus on ensuring further improvement in the quality of teaching. You and your team conduct rigorous checks on the quality of teaching through lesson observations. Support is provided for those whose performance is below expectations. All staff who have received this support have improved their teaching practice as a result. Teachers readily share ideas and work with each other to sharpen their own classroom practice.
- Leaders have focused on improving pupils' achievement in mathematics. A new subject leader and deputy leader have been appointed. They have undertaken a review of the department, and have a clear view of where improvements need to be made. The academy has recruited specialist mathematics teachers. Leaders have also ensured that mathematics lessons within each year group are timetabled at the same time. As a result, pupils can be moved between different ability sets, depending upon their need. Leaders have also introduced new systems for the detailed analysis of pupils' performance in formal assessments. This allows leaders to identify specific areas of difficulty for individual pupils and so provide extra help precisely where it is needed. Consequently, there is an improvement in the progress current pupils are making in mathematics. You are aware that there is further work to do to ensure that this improvement is sustained, including ensuring that teachers plan activities which meet the needs of all pupils.
- Pupils' achievement at Key Stages 3 and 4 remains strong, with pupils achieving well in English, science, modern foreign languages and the humanities subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4. Since the last inspection,

there has been a rise in the proportion of pupils making the progress expected of them in English at Key Stage 4.

- You and your team have rightly identified that improving pupils' outcomes in the academic subjects at sixth form is a key priority for the academy. Leaders have demonstrated their capacity to improve pupils' outcomes in the academic subjects. They have taken action in response to underperformance in the academic subjects and could demonstrate recent improved progress made by pupils taking these subjects. Further work is required to build on these improvements, particularly in ensuring that teachers provide appropriate support to pupils where it is needed.
- Sixth form pupils spoke highly of the support they receive, particularly in science subjects, where they also have lessons in science-related mathematical skills. The proportion of pupils who progress to higher education is above the national average. Those pupils who do not progress to higher education move on to foundation courses, apprenticeships or employment. There were no Year 13 pupils in the last academic year who did not move on to some form of education, training or employment.
- The school has effective systems in place to monitor and analyse patterns of behaviour and absence. This enables staff to promptly identify concerns that need to be addressed. As a consequence of their diligence, overall absence and persistent absence are lower than the national averages. There is no variation between the attendance of different groups of pupils.
- Pupils feel safe at the academy and enjoy coming to the academy. They feel that they can share any concerns they may have with staff. Pupils reported that bullying happens very rarely, but that where it does occur it is dealt with swiftly. The academy teaches pupils to be safe, including in laboratories, online and when leaving the academy site. Pupils have also been taught about how to manage risk, and are aware of the need to keep themselves safe. Most parents who responded to Parent View said their child was happy at the academy and would recommend the academy to another parent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- leaders of mathematics take action to build on recent improvements in pupils' outcomes in this subject by ensuring that teachers plan activities which fully meet the needs of all pupils
- all senior and subject leaders are consistent in their application of the academy's policies in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and tracking pupil outcomes
- teachers use information on the progress pupils are making to further increase rates of achievement, particularly in academic subjects in the sixth form.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior and middle leaders and two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. We carried out six lesson observations across a range of subject areas, including a joint lesson observation with you, the headteacher. I observed you giving feedback to the teacher we jointly observed. Inspectors observed a house assembly and tutor time. Inspectors met with pupils from Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and from Year 13. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime, and took these opportunities to speak further with pupils. We viewed records about keeping pupils safe and about attendance and punctuality. We examined a range of documents, including the academy's own self-evaluation, improvement plan and information about pupils' outcomes for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 from the last academic year. We considered 70 responses to Parent View and a letter which a parent submitted. At the end of the day, I gave feedback to you, your senior leadership team and members of the governing body.