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Dear Mr Dean

Short inspection of Icknield High School

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 2016 with Sue Cox, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The senior leadership team possesses a good range of skills and attributes which complement each other well. All members of the team understand and execute their roles well so that the school continues to move forwards. Subject leaders have a particularly positive view of the school's senior leaders. They welcome the fact that they meet regularly with their line managers, and that they are held rigorously to account for the performance of their subject areas.

Parents, staff and pupils speak highly of the school's work to develop pupils' confidence and promote their well-being. This is supported by the positive comments received, particularly the views expressed in Ofsted's online questionnaire to parents. Parents praise the way the school knows its pupils. One parent wrote, 'They are not faces among the crowd, but individuals who are listened to.'

You are rightly proud of the school's strengths in promoting and developing pupils' skills in the visual arts. Inspectors were struck by the high-quality work in this area and impressed with the vibrant displays of pupils' work in textiles on display in the school's entrance.

Senior leaders regularly monitor, evaluate and review the school's provision. You use this information to inform improvement planning. You have shifted the

emphasis away from pupils' attainment to pupils' progress. This is particularly important as pupils enter your school with prior levels of attainment which are significantly below national averages.

You have high expectations of your teachers, and they, in turn, have equally high expectations of the pupils they teach. You carry out a range of monitoring activities to form your views on the quality of teaching over time in your school. You have faced great challenges in some subjects in retaining and recruiting teachers over the past year, particularly in English and in mathematics. Your current evaluation of teaching based on observations, outcomes, scrutiny of pupils' work and from more in-depth reviews of individual subjects shows that the quality of teaching over time is good. However, you acknowledge that some teaching still requires improvement and you have suitable systems in place to support, challenge and develop these colleagues.

Pupils behave sensibly around the school and in lessons and know and understand the clear boundaries you set for them. They enjoy coming to school and appreciate the wide range of activities the school makes available to them. You promote equality of opportunity well and strive to ensure that all pupils are treated the same. For example, you monitor pupils' behaviour, attendance and their achievement according to their ethnicity, gender and ability.

Pupils' outcomes over time are good, and their progress in mathematics has been consistently high, outperforming English over a number of years. Pupils' outcomes in mathematics dipped in 2016 and were closer to those in English. You attribute this partly to issues related to recruitment and retention of staff. However, you have now established greater stability in your staffing of these subjects.

You have successfully addressed some of the points for action identified at the time of the previous inspection. For example, teachers are implementing your current marking policy well, and pupils find their teachers' comments helpful in rectifying their errors. Your strategies to enable all groups of pupils in the school to make better progress have proved successful with some groups. For example, your work with disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, has reaped rewards. Teachers in many subjects typically plan activities to stretch and challenge the most able pupils. You acknowledge that there is still more work to be done with some of the other groups, including boys, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Additionally, pupils achieve better in some subjects than in others because not all subjects present an appropriate degree of challenge.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a particularly strong feature of the school's success. All staff are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe in school. You, your staff and members of the governing body regularly evaluate the impact of safeguarding procedures. The quality of staff training in safeguarding procedures is excellent. Systems are robust and all staff are up to date with their training. For example, all staff have

received and read the latest version of the document 'Keeping children safe in education' which came into force on 5 September 2016. Staff's awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation of young people is strong because they have all had training in the 'Prevent' duty. The school has followed the necessary procedures to the letter for any pupils whom it deems to be missing from school.

There are strong relationships between members of staff and pupils, which ensures that pupils trust adults in school and share information with them, knowing that it will be acted on. There is a no-blame culture if a member of staff makes a referral which proves to be unfounded. Staff told inspectors that they will not hesitate in making a referral if they have any concerns, rather than hesitate and run the risk of a situation being overlooked.

Governors are well informed about safeguarding matters. Safeguarding features as a regular agenda item on the student affairs committee and a member of the governing body contributed to a recent local authority review of safeguarding in the school. Any action points from this review were swiftly addressed. Governors have a good awareness of their role in making referrals to 'Channel', which is a multi-agency approach to identifying and providing support for young individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

The single central record of recruitment checks of staff meets requirements and any minor administrative errors were quickly rectified during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- Pupils enter the school with significantly low levels of prior attainment. By the time pupils leave the school in Year 11, their attainment improves so that they can compete with pupils from other schools to secure the next stage of their educational career.
- Progress made by pupils over time has been good, particularly in mathematics, French, German, science, business studies and visual arts. Although outcomes dipped in mathematics in 2016, you have analysed in depth the reasons for this and taken appropriate action. Pupils' outcomes were less favourable in 2016 in history and geography, but you have looked into the reason behind this and ensured that these subjects' action plans are strategic in addressing identified weaknesses.
- Information provided on current pupils' progress, as well as inspectors' scrutiny of the school's records of the quality of teaching, suggest that pupils' progress is likely to continue to improve. Leaders have added an additional hour to the teaching of English and mathematics to improve progress in these subjects. Inspectors concurred with senior leaders' findings when joint lesson observations took place.
- Your previous school specialism in visual arts has ensured a long-lasting legacy of success. Hence, you expect all pupils in key stage 4 to select a visual arts subject because you know that they are set to achieve well. This is particularly the case in textiles.

- You have spent pupil premium funding wisely to diminish differences in disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of others in the school. This aspect of the school's work has been particularly impressive. In addition, you have rightly focused on the most able disadvantaged pupils through a well-targeted project involving subject leaders for English, mathematics and science. Your information on these pupils' achievement demonstrates that due care and consideration were given to providing these pupils with well-thought-out support. You are now about to build on this success by rolling out this programme to include humanities subjects and modern foreign languages.
- Your school improvement planning rightly focuses on other groups of pupils in the school to improve their progress over time. For example, boys typically achieve less well than girls and some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities could make better progress.
- Where teachers provide a high degree of challenge for most-able pupils, and to some extent middle-attaining pupils, they achieve well. Senior leaders monitor the performance of these groups particularly robustly in English, mathematics and science, but less so in other subjects.
- The academic performance of children who are looked after is monitored closely and involves subject leaders. The school liaises closely with the 'virtual headteacher' of these pupils who is appointed by the local authority, to ensure that the additional funding allocated to them is targeted appropriately and promotes their pastoral well-being and develops their academic performance.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding has been used well to improve pupils' weak skills in English and mathematics. The school can point to some remarkable improvements in pupils' reading ages as a result of carefully mapped intervention and support. Indeed, pupils enjoy reading and those who have received additional support testify that the school's interventions have made them better readers. The school's most able pupils are articulate and have a passion for reading, drawing from a wide range of reading materials. The school's recently renovated learning resource centre provides a calm environment in which pupils can study.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision are monitored closely to ensure that they achieve well. Attendance for these pupils is high and senior leaders receive regular reports on their attendance, attitudes and achievement.
- The school's self-evaluation summary document is evaluative and rightly identifies weaker aspects of the school's provision. This document informs whole-school priorities as well as subject improvement documentation. Clear lines of communication between senior leaders and subject leaders ensure accountability and a desire to improve.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good overall. Pupils clearly enjoy their learning and are encouraged by their teachers to achieve well. Teachers build on pupils' previous learning and support pupils in making good progress by adhering to the school's marking policy which requires them to point out to pupils how they can improve.

- Some teaching requires improvement because the work presented to pupils does not pose sufficient challenge and this then stalls progress. Some teachers do not always check that their pupils have understood what they are being taught and then set them tasks that they cannot do.
- Leaders are working well with weaker teachers and monitor their work closely, setting them achievable targets within tight deadlines. This work has been supplemented by using an electronic recording system which captures teachers' practice and allows them to reflect in time for the next lesson.
- Pupils' good behaviour in lessons allows them to enjoy their learning. This behaviour is replicated outside lessons as pupils move around the school and when they socialise with each other during breaktimes. Pupils are well equipped for their lessons and also wear their uniform smartly. They attend school regularly and in line with national averages, and the number of recorded behavioural incidents has declined significantly over time.
- Pupils feel safe in school and school leaders ensure that safeguarding of pupils is at the core of the school's work. Pupils respect each other's differences, including ethnicity, ability, faith, disability and sexuality. The school's personal, social, health and economic education sessions, as well as assemblies, deliver sessions on keeping safe and dealing with incidents of bullying, including cyber-bullying and sexting. These sessions also promote fundamental British values. Pupils are keen to ensure that fairness prevails, that their peers are treated equally and that doing the right thing becomes the norm. They are given a number of opportunities to take on responsibilities and have raised significant amounts of money for both national and local charities, including a local hospice.
- Pupils receive good-quality careers guidance. A specialist member of staff provides individual guidance and this is supplemented through specially organised evening events to ensure that pupils make the right choices. Nearly every pupil who leaves the school is in education, employment or training.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is achieved through a range of committees to which the school's leaders report on a regular basis. Governors also participate in internal reviews of subject areas, which are based on a wide range of activities and supporting evidence, resulting in key points for action. Members of the governing body bring with them a range of skills and attributes which enable them to fulfil their role effectively. They seek to fill any gaps in skills by seeking out relevant and appropriate training.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching in all subjects provides a high degree of challenge, particularly for pupils with middle and high prior attainment and that the performance of these pupils is monitored as rigorously as it is in English, mathematics and science
- the differences in achievement between subjects are diminished, as well as the differences between boys and girls
- pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make improved progress.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and a group of pupils from Years 7 to 11. Inspectors held a meeting with two members of the governing body and conducted a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body. A brief discussion was also conducted with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors looked at responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and also considered responses to the online staff and pupil questionnaires. They observed teaching and learning in lessons, accompanied by senior leaders, looked at pupils' books and scrutinised a range of school documents.