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Mr S Marsh
Headteacher
Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys
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Dear Mr Marsh

Short inspection of Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017 with Peter Rodin, 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 last inspection. You have taken on the leadership of the school following the recent unexpected retirement of the previous headteacher. You and the other leaders, including those in post since the start of this year, aim to provide the best possible education for each pupil. The staff team and strong governing body support you well in your drive to achieve this. Parents are positive, describing 'a wonderful school' where pupils make 'fantastic progress'.

Your staff demonstrate the school values of 'respect, excellence and determination' well. This creates an atmosphere where pupils and students flourish and develop as fully rounded individuals. A parent said, 'My son is thriving'. Pupils and students feel very well cared for. Of particular note is the special provision leaders make for the social and mental health needs of pupils and students. This is valued highly by all. Pupils also enjoy the range of school clubs and experiences they are offered. There is an obvious sense of trust and mutual respect between pupils and adults. As a result, pupils and staff work tirelessly together to achieve their best.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the school's many strengths, including leadership, the curriculum and excellent behaviour. Inspectors also highlighted the need for leaders to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and to improve how subject leaders use information about pupils' progress to support their work. You have acted effectively on the recommendations made at the previous inspection. The majority of teachers use achievement information more effectively

than previously, in planning and in teaching, so that pupils' learning is improving. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. You have also introduced useful systems for staff to share their most effective strategies so that there is more consistently strong teaching across subjects and year groups.

You recognised that the school's assessment system needed improvement and made appropriate changes. Consequently, leaders' checks on pupils' progress are much improved. These provide better information for teachers to plan effectively to meet the differing needs of pupils. In some subjects, the changes made are under way but not yet fully in place, for example in music, religious studies and design technology.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have in place an effective system that makes sure that all pupils are safe. Procedures and policies meet statutory requirements. Records are detailed and of high quality. Your designated safeguarding leader has good support from a deputy. Governors and leaders have been appropriately trained in safer recruitment procedures. Training of staff and governors is both comprehensive and regular. For example, the staff are provided with training for any changes to safeguarding practices as they arise, including child protection. Staff know the signs to look out for that may indicate that a pupil is at risk of harm. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies as required, such as social services, to support vulnerable pupils and students. Pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils are aware of how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. Instances of bullying are very rare. When they do arise, the staff deal with them swiftly.

Inspection findings

- During the discussion with you and your deputy at the start of the day, we discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included:
 - the effectiveness of safeguarding
 - the extent to which leaders have been successful in ensuring that A-level outcomes in most subjects are consistently above national average or improving
 - how well leaders are using pupil premium funding to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and in particular the most able
 - how effective leaders have been in increasing the proportion of the highest grades achieved by the most able pupils in key stage 4.
- Leaders recognise that some results for A-level subjects were disappointing in the summer of 2016. Results in several subjects were below national averages in terms of the progress that students made from their starting points. In response, leaders have improved the monitoring of the performance of subjects and have accurately identified aspects that need improvement. They have put in place effective strategies to raise performance, for example mentoring, tutorials and subject workshops. As a consequence, there is evidence of improvement in the progress of current students in both AS- and A-level subjects.

- Leaders' skilful evaluation of the most able pupils' performance in last year's GCSE examinations identified underachievement in a limited number of subjects. While the proportion of pupils who achieved A* to A grades was above the national average in many subjects, this was not the case in music, physical education, design technology, drama and religious studies. Consequently, leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of assessment of pupils' progress. You provide high-quality training for teaching staff to ensure that they share with pupils what they need to know to achieve the highest grades. Current achievement information indicates that an increased number of pupils are on target to achieve the highest grades in these subjects.
- Typically, disadvantaged pupils make good progress, especially those within the average prior attainment group. However, you rightly identified that in 2016 the most able disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 made less progress than you expected, and you looked into this. Consequently, you have used pupil premium funding well to address the issues you found. In particular, leaders have worked to improve pupils' literacy in Year 7. Current achievement information, and inspection evidence, shows the significant impact of these interventions. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' progress in key stage 3 and key stage 4 is improving.
- Teaching in English and mathematics is strong in the school. Progress by the end of key stage 4 is consistently high, and in 2016 the achievement of pupils in these subjects was well above the national average. Leaders have established good systems for teachers from these departments to share their strategies for sustained achievement with staff in other subjects. As a result, there is evidence that the quality of teaching continues to improve in the school, leading to improving progress for all groups of pupils across subjects. For example, pupils in design technology show rapidly increasing rates of progress currently.
- Study programmes in the sixth form meet requirements. The school's positive reputation attracts a growing number of female students to its sixth form. One commented, 'I feel like a person not a grade in this school.' Year 13 students are highly complimentary of the support they receive in preparation for life beyond school. For example, your provision for learning life skills, such as personal finance arrangements and living independently, is much valued. Leaders have strongly supported students' moves to higher education, resulting in successful applications to universities increasing from 65% in 2014 to 88% in 2016.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve the quality of assessment in music, physical education, design technology, drama and religious studies to match that of other subjects, so that all pupils achieve the highest possible grades, especially the most able
- leaders of 16–19 programmes continue to focus on the limited number of subjects where pupils are making less progress than similar students nationally and ensure that those few pupils who are achieving less well catch up.

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

Yours sincerely

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your deputy headteacher at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection.

Over the day, inspectors held further discussions with you and other senior leaders. I met with the chair of the governing body. Inspectors, accompanied by you and senior leaders, visited 15 parts of lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders. Inspectors took account of 262 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered written comments completed by 24 parents. There were no responses recorded to either the pupil or the staff online questionnaires. One inspector spoke with pupils at breaktime and at lunchtime. Inspectors also met with a group of pupils from Year 11 and separately with students from Year 13. There was also a meeting with a group of staff. Inspectors analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, and safeguarding policies and procedures.