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Ms Agnes Bailey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Bailey

Short inspection of Ash Manor School

Following my visit to the school on 16 March 2017 with Debbie Godfrey-Phaure, 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 December 2012.

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 up post in January 2016, and immediately identified correctly the weaker aspects of the school's work. The changes you introduced are already evident in pupils' improved behaviour and willingness to learn, for example, and the revised, much broader curriculum. As a parent observed, 'There have been significant and superb changes for the positive since the new headteacher took over; expectations have greatly improved.'

Your experienced and reflective deputy and assistant headteachers, middle leaders, staff and governors support you enthusiastically and effectively. You filled all the teaching vacancies for the present academic year and made shrewd appointments. Several parents, rightly, praise the new special educational needs coordinator's work and how they and their children are supported 'with kindness and understanding'. The new leader of English has quickly tackled pupils' reading and writing. However, the leader acknowledges that further work is needed to overcome some weaknesses, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, in the past. Many parents described how much their children enjoy lessons, one commenting on 'how amazing the staff are at Ash Manor'.

Ash Manor has the highest number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in Surrey and the highest number of settled Travellers in the country. Two of your five core values, 'respect' and 'community', are reflected in how fully these pupils are integrated and engaged with school life. They make considerably more progress than their counterparts nationally and their absence, although high, is nearly half that seen nationally. The fact that you have a Gypsy and Roma inclusion assistant and encourage the participation of elder community members has meant that some parents now let their children go on school trips. A member of staff is to present evidence to the equalities minister and speak at a national conference, and regularly shares inclusion expertise with other schools. This expertise is equally effective for pupils transferring from primary school and for those who join the school mid-year or after Year 7.

Another core value, 'integrity', is seen in how you seek and value pupils' opinions. They debated and wrote 'student 7' (what pupils expect from each other) to complement the staff's 'teachers 8' (planning great lessons). Reflecting the areas for improvement in the previous inspection, teachers now pose challenging questions and encourage pupils to work hard. The most able pupils' progress has accelerated, although you recognise that these improvements need to continue. During this inspection, pupils were often seen sharing their thoughts, helping each other and persevering with work. 'Resilience' is another core value. The school is calm and pupils behave sensibly during breaks. Key stage 3 pupils said that they looked forward to school and one remarked that, 'I'd rather go here than anywhere else.'

Having changed its structure and composition in 2015, the governing body moved into a higher gear, acquiring the professional skills and expertise to support and probe the school's work well. Governors now feel welcome to visit during the school day and appreciate the headteacher's receptiveness to their observations. They meet pupils regularly and listen carefully to what they say about school life. They particularly support the school's focus on preparing pupils for their future. Pupils are involved in an enormous number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities. Recently, Year 7 girls took part in a STEM event supported by National Rail Network and a school team has reached the national final of the Elite Engineers Robotic Challenge competition.

Safeguarding is effective.

'Excellence', the school's fifth core value, underpins the school's determination to address all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. The designated safeguarding lead is well qualified, records are meticulous and staff training is extremely thorough. This is extended and refreshed not just annually but throughout the year with a mixture of online and face-to-face instruction. All parents receive a detailed guide to safeguarding and are encouraged to use the online courses that the school shares with them.

A pupil said that they get 'loads' of information about e-safety. Pupils have no excuse not to be aware of the dangers of sexting, social media sites or how they, as much as staff, are responsible for keeping an eye out for all pupils' welfare. Regular

personal development days are used to promote a range of safety topics. Recently, all Year 11 pupils studied first aid; many were awarded the basic qualification. Year 10 pupils learned about the 'Prevent' duty, discussing the risks surrounding extremism.

Leaders and staff are fully alert to pupils' welfare in terms of their mental and physical health and how both can impact on their happiness and progress. Racist comments are extremely rare but dealt with strongly. If bullying happens, firm procedures are followed for resolution. A parent wrote that her daughter overcame bullying with school support and now flourishes to the point where she sometimes acts like a therapist herself!

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, my colleague and I outlined the aspects of the school's work we hoped to explore. These included: why English GCSE results had dropped in recent years and were lower than those in mathematics and science; what progress had been made to further reduce the difference between disadvantaged and other pupils' progress; what actions were in place to raise outcomes for the most able pupils; and exploring the reasons for high absence and exclusions. You observed that our issues came as no surprise as they were the areas you had focused on since your appointment.
- Pupils' learning in English has been transformed this year with a new, ambitious and experienced subject leader and an almost new team of enthusiastic teachers. The lead now insists that pupils study texts that she describes as, 'tricky but not impossible' and that they must respond to questions that probe their understanding. Reading in tutor time and 'reading bingo' encourage pupils to read more. At the same time, an energised focus on literacy and high-level vocabulary is emerging in all subjects. In all years, pupils are making good progress, writing at length, taking care over the presentation of their work and improving their spelling and grammar.
- With several well-considered actions in place during the last few years, the differences between groups of pupils' progress had diminished, but had not been eradicated. Teaching styles generating strong outcomes in 2016, for example in posing questions to disadvantaged pupils in science, have been introduced in other subjects. Staff training has focused on ways to support disadvantaged pupils further. School assessment information shows that there is no difference between the progress of these and other pupils in Year 7. In several subjects, in all other years, disadvantaged pupils' progress is close to that made by other pupils as teaching has improved since September 2016.
- However, it is the culmination of research into many aspects of disadvantaged pupils' aspirations and their attitudes to school and learning that has revealed new ways to help these pupils. Links with other factors have emerged. Year 8 disadvantaged girls, for example, have the lowest positive feelings about school; fewer than 50% of their parents attended their parents' evening and just over 10% attended a curriculum information evening.
- At the same time, leaders have concentrated teachers' focus on the most able

pupils by delivering high-quality training for them and by arranging activities and extra resources for these pupils. School information suggests that more of the younger, most-able pupils are making good progress from their starting points and that Year 11 pupils are set to achieve better outcomes in GCSEs. The headteacher knows that more work needs to be done in this area.

- Detailed analysis of the school's below-average attendance rates was shared with the inspectors and it is clear that, for a variety of reasons beyond the school's control, a small number of pupils' extremely high absence distorts the overall figures. You are not apologetic that your demands for high standards of behaviour contributed to the rise in exclusions last year; they are now falling as behaviour improves.
- Underpinning the improvements taking place is the broad curriculum you have introduced. Technology subjects are flourishing in excellent facilities, the separate sciences are being introduced and more creative subjects are offered. Pupils now choose more options to study in Year 9 before making their final GCSE choices in Year 10. All the school's core values contribute to the effective provision for pupils' personal development. They develop their respect for the different lifestyles and faiths of others and their understanding of democracy and related British values. The assembly during the inspection was led by the student leadership group, whose members visit lessons to consider whether pupils are sticking to the 'student 7'. The final comment was: 'We feel that we give up too easily; a growth mind-set is really important.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the factors revealed by the school's detailed research to be contributing to disadvantaged pupils' underachievement are incorporated into future actions so that their rates of progress accelerate
- all teachers intensify their focus on improving the most able pupils' progress and attainment, particularly for those who are disadvantaged.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I held meetings with you, members of your senior leadership team, several subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. I met a representative from the local authority and three members of the governing body, including the chair. We talked to pupils informally around the school and in lessons and held meetings with groups of key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils. My colleague observed assembly and between us we visited a range of classes across the school, accompanied by a senior leader. We scrutinised and evaluated documents related to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, your research into pupils' attitudes to learning and leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and development plan. We took into account 83 responses to the staff questionnaire, 70 predominantly positive comments written by parents, and 99 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.