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6 April 2017

Mr Tim Bassett  
Headteacher  
The Rawlett School (An AET Academy)  
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Dear Mr Bassett

### **Short inspection of The Rawlett School (An AET Academy)**

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017 with Paul Topping, 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 February 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 and your well-established leadership team are deeply committed to the school and are proud of the exceptional progress made by your pupils in many areas. Your staff and pupils share your pride in the school and recognise the continuing improvements.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You were able to clearly articulate areas in need of improvement and had put in place actions plans that would support this. However, some leaders were not sure about whether these initiatives had been consistently implemented across the school to therefore be making a positive difference. For example, pupils told us that they had very different opportunities during form time to participate in the personal development programme despite an agreed schedule of activities. You recognise that further work needs to be done to ensure that senior and middle leaders are checking that agreed actions and activities are in place.

You rightly point to the significant improvement in mathematics since the last inspection as an example of the impact of effective school improvement activity. A new curriculum has been developed to ensure that all pupils have enough time to develop a good understanding of the key concepts. Assessment information is used forensically to target interventions for those in need of help. Lessons are purposeful and challenging and pupils engage well with planned activities. Pupils of all ability groups now make rapid progress in mathematics.

Following the last inspection, the school was asked to make sure that tasks were always clearly explained to pupils. Teachers have had training in developing teaching strategies that help pupils understand their work. Teachers target questions at specific pupils to check their learning and pupils are encouraged to assess their progress against assessment targets, thereby following school policies. Pupils confirmed that they enjoy their learning and believe that teachers are good at helping them understand things. The wide range of evidence we took into account during our visit supported your evaluation that teaching is supporting pupils' good progress, and this was also evident in pupils' books. Leaders are now planning to prioritise staff training on strategies to ensure that good teaching and targeted intervention has a better impact on improving the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, who do not do as well as their peers in many subjects.

You are also aware that disadvantaged pupils do not attend as regularly as other pupils at your school. You have an effective plan for spending your pupil premium funding and can point to the improvements in attendance for these pupils over the last few years. However, attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still too low, and not improving rapidly enough, particularly for those pupils who are persistently absent from school. Disadvantaged pupils are also more likely to be excluded from school than their peers.

The governing body has an excellent in-depth knowledge of the school and the chair of governors is a regular visitor. Governors' minutes show that governors regularly challenge leaders about their work and the outcomes for pupils. They carry out all their statutory responsibilities. Governors are keen to ensure that the school continues to work closely alongside others, including schools in the locality and in the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET).

The AET recognises the strengths in you and your leadership team and you are providing support two days a week to another school in the trust. Some of your leadership responsibilities have been passed on to other senior colleagues to ensure that good capacity is sustained for continuing improvement.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Governors and leaders are committed to keeping pupils safe and this is evident in the attention given to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive regular training in all aspects of safeguarding. The school keeps a careful record of this and knows that the training is being put to good use. New and temporary staff are provided with timely safeguarding information. Governors and leaders have been trained to ensure that they understand how to safely recruit staff.

The school has set up a dedicated team of house leaders who work with staff, parents and external agencies to provide support for vulnerable pupils. Pupils know where to turn when they need help or want to report a concern like bullying and value this support. However, there is a group of pupils with very poor attendance

who do not receive timely external help to get them into school. As a result, attendance for these pupils is not improving quickly enough.

Pupils told us that they felt safe in school and the school supported them well in understanding how to keep themselves safe. They valued the opportunities to discuss difficult and challenging issues on 'collapsed' timetable days. These days give pupils the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of topics like child sexual exploitation through case studies and stories.

## **Inspection findings**

- Assessment information about pupils' progress is collected on a regular basis and carefully analysed. Concerns are raised with the relevant heads of departments for intervention. Leaders recognise the importance of not working in isolation and insist all departments are involved in standardising work with staff from other schools to help raise standards.
- There are a number of curriculum areas, including humanities, mathematics and science, where most pupils made very good progress in 2016 GCSE examinations. In humanities, pupils are provided with challenging and engaging learning activities. There is a lot of pupils' work displayed in classrooms providing an inspirational learning environment. In mathematics, there has been a significant improvement in outcomes since the implementation of the improvement action plan following the last inspection. Leaders are sensibly using the heads of these effective departments to provide support to those departments whose results were lower. The impact of such support has already been seen in modern foreign languages, where pupils' progress is rapidly improving.
- Middle-ability boys did poorly in their GCSE examinations in 2016. Leaders believed this to be a one-off occurrence rather than an ongoing trend. Nevertheless, they used these disappointing results to thoroughly review how the school can improve the engagement and achievement of boys. Staff have developed ways of building boys' confidence and are providing teaching resources that help them structure their learning. The English department reviewed and changed the class texts so that they were of greater interest to boys. Current school tracking information shows that there is very little difference in the attainment of boys and girls.
- The school is an orderly environment and a culture of respect is evident. Relationships between pupils in lessons and in social areas at break and lunchtime were positive and supportive. Your pupils told us that incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with fairly and effectively. Pupils were well-behaved in the lessons we visited. They generally engaged enthusiastically with their learning and your school records confirm that this is typical. The school collects information on sanctions and rewards but does not evaluate this information against key pupil groups, in particular to check whether disadvantaged pupils receive the same sanctions and encouragement as other pupils in the school.

- Pupils value the feedback they receive from teachers about their work. They were particularly positive about the 'I can' assessment sheets they use in English. These help them to understand what they can do well and what they need to do to improve.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- urgent action is taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those who are persistently absent from school
- further strategies are developed to ensure that the good teaching techniques currently in place are adapted and additional intervention put in place to ensure that disadvantaged pupils also make consistently good progress
- leaders' quality-assurance procedures are reviewed so that senior leaders are confident that all staff consistently implement planned actions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. 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 leader for pupil premium, a house leader and attendance coordinator. We scrutinised documents including governors' minutes, 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. We looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We spoke to a group of Year 11 pupils, to pupils in lessons and around the school and observed pupils at break and lunchtime. We took account of the 174 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and considered the 59 staff and 26 pupil responses to the Ofsted survey.

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

- how well the school is addressing the performance of middle-ability boys
- the achievement, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- the variation in performance of different subjects
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.