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Mr Phillip Grundy
Principal
Highams Park School
34 Handsworth Avenue
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Dear Mr Grundy

Short inspection of Highams Park School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 2017 with Christopher Christofides, 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 June 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 been in post since January 2016 and have made additional appointments at both senior and middle leadership level to help you in improving the quality of education at the school.

The good standard of education is evident in the 2016 examination results. Progress for pupils at the end of key stage 4 was significantly above the national average in English, modern foreign languages (where large numbers of pupils chose to study a language) and in the sciences. In languages and in the sciences, pupils' progress has been significantly above national averages over time. Less-able pupils, girls, boys, and pupils who have special educational support needs and/or disabilities achieved well in many of the subjects they studied. Differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils nationally diminished in both English and mathematics.

You have rightly identified that there are a few GCSE and work-related subjects, for example electronics, sociology and applied business, where pupils' attainment is not as high as it should be. Leaders track the progress of disadvantaged pupils overall. However, you acknowledge that the evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding on the progress of disadvantaged pupils from their different starting points could be even more rigorous.

Your self-evaluation of the school's work is honest and accurate. You and your

senior leaders work effectively as a team. There is a clear sense of commitment and ambition. You are taking effective action to improve teaching and outcomes for pupils, including students in the sixth form. Middle leaders told inspectors that they feel supported and challenged in equal measure. They are held to account for the quality of teaching in their subject areas. At the same time, they feel that the training that they and their teams receive is leading to improvement. As a result of your actions, staff morale is high. From the 77 replies to Ofsted's staff survey, 93% of staff strongly agreed or agreed they were proud to work at the school. Most staff feel that leaders are doing the right things to ensure that staff are motivated and respected.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. One pupil said during the inspection, 'adults deal with problems straight away'. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, explained how staff help them stay safe. This includes being aware of knife crime, sexting and radicalisation. Pupils who spoke to inspectors and those who completed the Ofsted survey agreed that they feel safe at school and that bullying is typically dealt with effectively. They also said that any form of racism or homophobia is not tolerated. Leaders record bullying carefully and records confirm that bullying, particularly incidences of racism, is rare. The majority of parents who contacted inspectors or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's survey for parents, agreed that their children were safe at school. Parents indicate that communication is improving, for example through the recently established parents' forum. Fixed-term exclusions have fallen sharply, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with support needs. The school's motto of 'Respect, Responsibility and Resilience' is well on the way to becoming an embedded reality.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the risks that have an impact on pupils in the local area, for example gang affiliation. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to protect pupils from these risks. This includes being proactive in educating pupils and responding quickly to concerns raised by staff. Staff refer concerns quickly. One parent commented that they were, 'relieved and pleased that my son has the emotional support he needs'. All safeguarding records are detailed and of a high quality. You are aware that although policies are up to date and meet statutory requirements, some out-of-date policies were on the school website. Leaders immediately remedied this.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on what actions leaders have taken to improve outcomes on academic courses in the sixth form, particularly for girls and students who enter into the sixth form with an average grade of a 'C'. This is because these two groups of students had not made the same progress as their peers.
- Leaders have improved the quality of advice and guidance to help students make the right decision about which courses best meet their needs and abilities. This means that students are now on either more appropriate academic or work-related courses. Courses that have not performed well, such as critical thinking,

are no longer on offer.

- The quality of teaching is improving; teachers have secure subject knowledge and use it to engage students in their learning. This is having an impact on improving current progress of females and students who enter into the sixth form with a 'C' grade average. However, during joint observations of learning, it was agreed that teachers are not routinely rigorous enough in ensuring that students who need help to catch up or who are most able are sufficiently challenged to deepen and secure their understanding.
- Students in the sixth form feel well supported and confirmed they feel that they are studying courses that meet their needs. Pupils in Year 11 are aware of the increased entry requirements to ensure that they are able to cope with the demands of A-level courses. This is particularly so for those requiring secure literacy skills.
- We also agreed to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to improve progress in mathematics. Although progress is in line with the national average, it is not as high as it is in English, sciences or languages.
- New leaders in mathematics were appointed in September 2016. They are working effectively to raise standards. Joint observations in mathematics and looking at work over time in pupils' books show that teaching is promoting good progress over time. Teachers' effective planning and delivery of content and their use of questioning is helping pupils to secure good knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders are tracking pupils' progress effectively. Pupils in Year 11 feel well-prepared and supported for the new GCSE mathematics examination. They are very grateful for the additional support and intervention classes that their teachers have organised. You decided to participate in a national programme and have been able to compare pupils' outcomes in mathematics mock examinations with other schools. Your results are comparing favourably, giving confidence that leaders are preparing students for the new GCSE examination effectively.
- Lastly, we agreed to evaluate what impact leaders are having in improving results in the small number of courses where they were below expectations in 2016. While some pupils achieved well in some subjects, they did not achieve as well in a small number of their other courses.
- You were swift to identify the issues and take effective action, and are tracking progress carefully. Visits to some classes in business, and design and technology, show that teachers are monitoring progress more effectively; pupils are more engaged in their learning. Your assessment information is showing improvement in some of these subjects. You rightly understand that there are still a few subjects such as electronics and sociology where progress is not as rapid.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for students studying academic courses in the sixth form, particularly

girls, continue to improve

- attainment in the small number of underperforming subjects at key stage 4 improves so that pupils achieve consistently highly across all of the subjects that they study.

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

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives from the governing body
- visits to classes with senior leaders, particularly in mathematics and sixth-form academic courses
- listening to a small group of pupils reading
- meeting groups of pupils, including students in the sixth form, to discuss the school's approach to keeping pupils safe and ensuring equality of opportunity
- evaluation of information provided by the school, including safeguarding records, exclusion records, bullying logs, the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress
- talking to pupils and staff informally throughout the school day
- taking into account the views of 96 responses to Parent View, 77 responses to the staff survey and 97 responses to the pupil survey
- evaluation of other communications made by parents, such as emails
- the lead inspector had a telephone call with a representative from the local authority.