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Mr Alex Russell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Russell

Short inspection of Epsom and Ewell High School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2017 with Steve Baker, 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 May 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 have improved the standing of the school in the local community and it is now the school of choice for local parents and pupils. You have increased the number of pupils in Years 7 to 11 by 10% in the past three years and more than doubled the number of students in the sixth form. You have skilfully established the position of the school within the Bourne Education Trust and are providing support to an increasing number of primary and secondary schools.

You have further developed senior and middle leaders so there is a culture of collaborative leadership across the school. You have appointed a team of committed and hardworking senior leaders in education who have a sharp focus on aspects of the school that need to improve. Leaders feel empowered to fulfil their responsibilities with your support. They are taking effective actions to address the school's priorities for improvement. Staff believe that leaders do all they can to improve teaching and learning. You have appointed teachers who are specialists in their subjects and developed many inexperienced staff to become highly effective practitioners. The majority of staff feel that the training and performance management they receive is of good quality.

You are challenged frequently by a highly skilled governing body. Governors have well-established processes for monitoring focal aspects of the school to equip them

with the information to hold you and senior leaders to account. However, governors' documents do not always reflect their judicious approach. You need to check that the information on the school's website is accurate and conforms to statutory regulations.

Pupils and students are happy in school. Teachers foster purposeful relationships with pupils and consequently pupils feel known as individuals. Pupils are confident that disruptive behaviour and bullying rarely occur and, if necessary, are dealt with rapidly and effectively. Parents are very positive about the school and the vast majority who expressed a view to inspectors would recommend it to other parents. Some parents made a special effort to share their views of the school with inspectors. Parents were keen to emphasise that you are very well respected by all members of the school and wider community and they appreciate your openness and visibility.

Pupils who are disadvantaged made less progress than others in 2015 and 2016, as measured at the end of Year 11. In 2016, the difference was most significant in mathematics, humanities and languages. Leaders have now implemented a range of suitable strategies to support disadvantaged pupils in all years across the school. Pupils' results of assessments throughout this year confirm that the efforts of teachers and leaders are beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils' achievements are now closer to those of other pupils. Leaders know they must sustain their efforts in this area to rapidly accelerate the progress of all disadvantaged pupils.

Senior leaders have focused on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The sixth form is well led and teaching has improved. Staff have encouraged an increased number of students to remain in the school for their post-16 studies. Consequently, there is greater variation of students' abilities in the cohort. In 2016, too few students achieved the highest academic grades at the end of the sixth form. You have rightly amended the curriculum to better suit students' needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have systems in place to check on the recruitment of staff and visitors. Staff are frequently trained and receive regular briefings to ensure that their knowledge is up to date. Consequently, staff spoken to know how to keep pupils safe and pupils told me they feel safe in school. Leaders work in partnership with external agencies and strive relentlessly to secure additional support for pupils and families where needed. Staff are aware of the connections between pupils' absence and safeguarding and follow up concerns if necessary. Members of the governing body take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously to check that appropriate systems are in place to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils and students are taught to keep themselves safe through a personal, health

and social education programme that, as well as lessons, includes assemblies, drama events and workshops. Pupils are aware of risks associated with the misuse of drugs and alcohol, sexual relationships and inappropriate use of the internet. In addition, older pupils know about a wide range of possible dangers including, for example, extremism and radicalisation.

In recent years, pupils' attendance has been slightly below the national average. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend much less regularly than others. Leaders have introduced a programme to re-engage pupils who experience prolonged periods of absence. Although initially having a positive impact, the programme has not sustained an increase in attendance for all vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, as well as focusing on the quality of safeguarding and actions taken since the previous inspection, inspectors pursued several lines of enquiry. These were: the progress and attainment of pupils in mathematics and humanities; the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged; the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who are hearing impaired; the quality of teaching of higher-ability pupils and students; and attendance of specific groups.
- In 2015 and 2016, pupils' outcomes in mathematics were not as good as they had been in previous years. You have taken effective steps to improve the leadership of the department and teaching by employing experienced mathematicians. Teachers have expert knowledge of their subjects and the requirements of the new GCSE examinations. You have wisely used additional funding to create smaller classes and pupils benefit from closer monitoring by teachers. As a result, pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate.
- Pupils know that teachers have high expectations of them and those in the highest-ability sets in mathematics are taught exceptionally well. Teachers continually challenge pupils and effectively target support where it is needed. Consequently, pupils feel a sense of pride in their achievements. Some pupils who do not find mathematics easy are not as enthusiastic to meet the high level of challenge.
- You have taken decisive actions to improve the leadership of the history department. As a result, pupils are more engaged in lessons and are keen to improve their work. Pupils are now making more progress in this subject and the work in books is of a high standard.
- Leaders and teachers have high aspirations for pupils. Teachers consistently encourage and support pupils to do their best. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to discover options available to them after leaving school. Consequently, many more pupils are now applying for places at the top universities.
- You are appropriately using additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils

in a variety of ways to support their needs. Leaders have devised and implemented an effective system to regularly assess pupils. Pupils' results are analysed quickly and swift action is taken when pupils are falling behind. The senior leader who coordinates the needs of disadvantaged pupils is determined in his mission to improve their outcomes. He has quickly implemented a wide range of innovative strategies that are beginning to engage disadvantaged pupils so that they are making more rapid progress.

- In addition, you have appointed a senior member of staff with responsibility for 'closing the gap' between pupils who are disadvantaged and others. Pupils' progress is tracked closely and information shared with teachers and pastoral staff. Teachers know the pupils in their classes who are disadvantaged and are providing specific support to enable them to achieve. Work in the books of some disadvantaged pupils is now of a similar standard to that of others. Leaders know they must sustain their efforts in this area to rapidly accelerate the progress of all disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders have provided high-quality training to help teachers meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers are making good use of their learning in lessons and high-ability pupils' progress is improving rapidly. Teachers develop a purposeful atmosphere in lessons and there is a 'buzz' created by the pupils' eagerness to provide correct answers to difficult questions.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they are very well supported by a team who understands their needs. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed in the resource for pupils who are hearing impaired and are with them in lessons to enable them to fully participate in learning.
- You have identified that high-ability pupils and students should achieve higher grades in GCSE and post-16 qualifications. Leaders have created and presented a programme to develop staff's skills and expertise in this area. Teachers are using methods learned to stretch and challenge pupils and to deepen their learning. Teachers are rightly introducing the more stringent assessments required by the new examinations to all year groups across the school. Work in high-ability pupils' books confirms that they are being effectively prepared to reach the highest grades.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils who are disadvantaged make rapid progress to match other pupils from the same starting points, particularly in humanities and mathematics
- pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend school regularly
- the school's website meets statutory requirements.

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

Karen Roche
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, staff and governors. They scrutinised the school's website, policies on safeguarding and child protection, your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, the school's development plan and other documentation. With leaders, inspectors visited classrooms to see teaching, learning and assessment across a range of subjects. There were formal meetings with pupils as well as discussions with them around the school. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in English, mathematics, geography and history. Inspectors took account of the 48 parent responses to Parent View.