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Mr Mark Southworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Southworth

Short inspection of Woodcote High School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Patricia Slonecki and Tomris Ibrahim, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 2015

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Your aim is to provide an education which develops the essential skills pupils need for lifelong learning. The school has recently worked hard on fostering a 'growth mindset' in pupils. When speaking to inspectors, pupils said that this approach encourages them to learn from mistakes and become more confident. One pupil said, 'Teachers are helpful, they never give up on you.'

Pupils continue to behave well and sustain the good standards referred to in the previous inspection report. They are courteous, respectful and keen to talk about their achievements. They often work collaboratively together to create positive outcomes. In a music lesson, for example, pupils worked in pairs to successfully compose and perform music to accompany a short film clip. Inspectors found that standards of behaviour in lessons are usually high. The school's rate of exclusions is lower than the national average and attendance levels are higher than average.

The latest GCSE results showed that the school has maintained pupils' above-average attainment in English and mathematics. More pupils than the national average achieved the English Baccalaureate. Overall, pupils made strong progress. However, while the progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved since the previous inspection, they are still not making the same progress from

their starting points as other pupils nationally. Your strategies to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils were a focus for this inspection.

The school has strong support from parents and carers. A high number of parents responded to Parent View and they are very positive about the school. Nearly all respondents would recommend Woodcote High School to other parents.

You and your leadership team are well supported and challenged by an effective team of governors. They have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and regularly visit the school to observe learning with leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have promoted a strong culture of safeguarding. All the pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe and well looked after. Their parents agree. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. The single central record of staff recruitment checks is comprehensive and up to date.

All staff are trained to an appropriate level and receive regular safeguarding updates. Pupils causing concern are carefully monitored and appropriate referrals are made. There is evidence of leaders managing partnerships with a range of local authorities well. They are also persistent in ensuring that partners take appropriate action when a serious concern emerges. Your curriculum covers the consideration of key safeguarding issues with pupils, including e-safety. Rare instances of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- Our first agreed focus was the school's work to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The previous inspection noted some underperformance of this group of pupils. 2017 GCSE results saw these pupils make better progress than disadvantaged pupils nationally. However, overall, their progress is weaker than non-disadvantaged pupils and they attain less well in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The school has introduced a range of strategies to boost the performance of disadvantaged pupils. Screening of pupils in Year 7 shows that the majority of those with specific learning needs are also disadvantaged pupils. All class teachers are aware of who the disadvantaged pupils in their classes are and they discuss their progress and possible interventions with leaders. The appointment of three 'pupil premium champions' is an example of the school responding to pupils' feedback; these members of staff have had a positive impact on the attendance of those pupils they mentor, for example. These strategies notwithstanding, inspectors found that the school has not been fully effective in targeting the extra funds available to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, and leaders sometimes found it

difficult to demonstrate the impact of the funding. For example, some resources are made available to fund places on trips for disadvantaged pupils, but pupils were uncertain as to how they could apply for this support.

- Visits to classrooms showed a continuing mixed picture. In many classrooms, disadvantaged pupils, like others, were fully engaged in learning. This was seen, for example, in drama. Some made strong progress and took pride in the work in their books. In other cases, though, books were untidily presented and contained unfinished work, indicating underachievement. Overall, the school's assessment information is indicating better attainment of disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics compared to last year. As yet, however, the strategies you have introduced have not had time to work through and a lack of rigour in evaluation of your actions is diluting their impact.
- We next investigated the effectiveness of the school's actions to raise achievement in the sixth form. This, too, was a recommendation in the previous report. Overall, 2017 results show that students are achieving in line with national figures and that there were some small variations across different subjects. Rightly, the school's current emphasis is on subjects where results were weaker last year, for example in mathematics and Spanish. A particular focus has been to encourage regularly students' own use of assessments to pinpoint where they need to take action to address gaps in their knowledge.
- Effective teaching was seen in the lessons we observed. Teachers' enthusiasm is shared by students. Skilful questioning clarifies their understanding and deepens their thinking. Students have gained effective research skills so they can learn independently. In an art lesson, for example, students were perceptive in interpreting the work of an artist they had chosen.
- More broadly, students were very positive about their experience in Woodcote High School sixth form. They were appreciative of the strong support teachers that give them to improve their academic work and the guidance they receive in applying for university places. One student, typical of others, said, 'Coming to Woodcote Sixth Form is the best decision I have made in a while.' Strong leadership, positive relationships and high-quality teaching are contributing to the growing success of your sixth form. As a result, the school's latest assessment information indicates a considerable improvement in students' progress this year. Even so, as we agreed, there is scope to challenge most-able students even further.
- Additionally, we agreed to find out how leaders have strengthened the use of assessment, including teachers' questioning, to improve teaching in the lower school. Your previous inspection report indicated that this was an important next step for the school.
- Leaders have put in place an imaginative new assessment framework using the idea of 'mountain climbing' to represent progress and achievement. Where teaching was most effective, pupils used the framework well to identify next steps in their learning. However, inspectors observed that the

new framework was not always used explicitly; therefore, its impact on pupils' progress is not yet fully evident.

- In visits to lessons in key stage 3, inspectors witnessed strong examples of effective questioning, and interesting connections being made to real-life situations. In such circumstances, pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning. However, such challenge and relevance was lacking in some lessons and there were cases where this resulted in pupils' lack of engagement. Furthermore, pupils indicated that homework was not set consistently; parents also expressed some concern about this. Overall, therefore, some inconsistency remains in key stage 3, so pupils are not yet making sustained good progress across the range of subjects.
- Finally, we decided to evaluate how well the curriculum in the upper school meets the needs and aspirations of pupils. Inspectors found that pupils have the opportunity to follow a wide range of arts and technology courses, alongside academic subjects. Pupils spoke very positively about the choices available. You have also carefully tailored curriculum 'pathways' so that, for example, there is extra weight on English and mathematics for lower-attaining pupils. Overall, 60% of pupils now follow courses leading to the English Baccalaureate. This is above the national average. Despite some variation in results across different subjects, your work on the curriculum has resulted in the strong progress indicated in last year's GCSE results.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment is used effectively across all subjects to improve progress in the lower school
- the school evaluates its actions more precisely in order to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils
- even greater challenge is provided for the most-able sixth form students.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of Croydon Children's Services. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Whiting
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors visited 30 lessons across a range of subjects. Mostly with senior leaders, they observed the quality of teaching and learning and spoke to pupils and sixth-form students about their work. They interviewed

senior and middle leaders, governors, a group of disadvantaged pupils and others from across the age range. Inspectors observed behaviour around the school. They scrutinised documentation, pupils' and students' work and the responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire.