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Mr David Derbyshire
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Dear Mr Derbyshire

Short inspection of Wadham School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 2018 with Katherine Powell, 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 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Leadership at the school has remained stable since the last inspection. Recently, however, the school has experienced a level of staff turbulence. You have had to make some difficult staffing decisions, because of the need to reduce budget commitments, which has been challenging. This has had a negative impact on school improvement and pupils' progress. You know the school well. You understand its strengths and are open and honest about what needs to be even better. You are focused on continuous improvement. However, your strategic plans for improvement are not robust enough or precise enough for senior leaders to use easily to measure the impact of actions and make adjustments if necessary.

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to accelerate the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders' actions have had limited success. The rates of progress for current disadvantaged pupils continue to be variable across year groups. Pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, was below the national average in 2017. The least able pupils' progress was in line with the national average, and these pupils continue to make strong progress this year. Pupils' progress in mathematics has risen, and pupils talk positively about their progress and enjoyment of this subject. This is not, however, consistent across all subjects,

particularly science, where pupils' progress is variable. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, spoke about the variability in teachers' feedback and support. Pupils are appreciative of the wide range of activities available to them, particularly in sport and creative pursuits.

The school has an inclusive ethos and often admits pupils who have not succeeded elsewhere. The school works hard with pupils to ensure that they have the support and opportunities they require to progress and prepare for their lives after school. The school works with local alternative providers in providing relevant educational provision for pupils that require an individualised curriculum.

A number of parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey are satisfied with the quality of education the school provides, particularly for their children who have SEN and/or disabilities. Some parents are concerned about the high level of staff absence, the quality of teaching in recent years, particularly in science, and the behaviour of some pupils, but many praise the dedication of staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that staff are trained well and knowledgeable so that they can spot and deal with any concerns they identify about pupils' welfare or well-being quickly. They liaise well with any external agencies when necessary. Staff follow the school's policies and procedures consistently to report any concerns they identify about pupils' welfare or well-being. That everyone is rightly aware of the need to be vigilant about safeguarding was a constant theme running through our discussions with staff, school leaders and governors. Written records about any such concerns and the actions taken are timely and thorough. The required checks on staff before they are employed are carried out and suitably recorded in line with statutory requirements.

The school has a friendly atmosphere. Pupils and sixth-form students feel safe and well cared for. However, a number of parents that responded to Parent View expressed very mixed views of how effectively the school deals with bullying. Pupils also commented that bullying is not always effectively dealt with. Senior leaders are now using an online application to allow pupils to report incidents anonymously. They are ensuring that outcomes from investigating incidents are reported back to the victims. Pupils receive suitable guidance on the risks they face, such as the risks of using social media, through assemblies and personal development lessons. Pupils reported that they feel safe online and are aware of what to do if they are at risk.

Inspection findings

- To decide whether the school remains good, the first key line of enquiry centred on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. For the previous two academic years, disadvantaged pupils' progress has been weak and so their attainment at GCSE has fallen well short of that of other pupils nationally. The school has concentrated on pupils' progress in English and mathematics in Year 11. Disadvantaged pupils currently in Year 11 are now making significantly better

progress, but those in Years 9 and 10 are not achieving as well. The strategy for spending the pupil premium lacks precision. Leaders have not identified the main barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Consequently, actions to improve the progress of this group of pupils are not closely matched to their needs.

- The second key line of enquiry evaluated the most able pupils' achievement in English and science. In 2017, the most able pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, was significantly below the national average. However, in mathematics the progress that this group of pupils made was in line with that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Senior leaders identified the progress of high-prior-attaining pupils as an area for improvement, and teachers provide extra challenge to stretch pupils' skills, particularly in Year 11. Consequently, the most able pupils' progress has accelerated in English, and more of this group are on track to attain the higher grades than previously. However, this is not the case in science.
- A third key line of enquiry considered the academic progress of sixth-form students. Students' progress at A level was significantly below that of others nationally in 2017. Students taking English and mathematics at GCSE again in the sixth form have succeeded in achieving GCSE grade 4 or above.
- You are aware of the inconsistencies and quality of teaching in A-level subjects. Students are typically able to explain the key concepts they are learning about. Teachers give them frequent opportunities to think deeply about ideas in science, mathematics, religion and philosophy, and so they are making good progress. However, this is not the case in other subjects, for example English. There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and variability in the quality of feedback that restrict students from trying to improve and reach their full potential.
- Some years ago, the rate of pupils' attendance was around the national average. Over the past two years, it has fallen to below the national average. Senior leaders have introduced tighter systems for recording and following up pupils' absence. They have halted the decline overall, and, particularly for those pupils with the poorest attendance, the trend is being reversed. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not attend school regularly enough. Senior leaders recognise that the rate of attendance is still not good enough. They are also aware that teachers do not routinely expect pupils to make up the work they have missed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they match the pupil premium strategy precisely to pupils' needs and evaluate it regularly to assess its impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- the most able pupils achieve highly in all subject areas, particularly in science
- the quality of teaching in the sixth form improves, so that students know what they have to do to improve and progress is more rapid

- attendance continues to improve, and absentees catch up on work missed.

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

Yours sincerely

Gillian Hickling
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority, the school's education partner and executive link officer by telephone.

Inspectors observed learning across the school jointly with senior leaders. We looked at examples of pupils' and students' work. We had discussions with pupils from key stage 4 and students from the sixth form and spoke with many other pupils informally. We scrutinised a variety of documents including the school's own evaluation of its performance, assessment information, records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to behaviour and attendance. I spoke on the telephone and met with one parent of a former pupil at the school. Inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires from 40 staff and 174 pupils and students in the sixth form. We considered 51 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.