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Mrs Sarah Burns
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Burns

Short inspection of Sandbach School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Deborah Bailey and David Woodhouse, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Together with your leaders, you have successfully established a caring school community in which pupils feel safe, valued and supported. Parents appreciate the supportive nature of the school. They said that their children are happy, well looked after and making good progress. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and they have confidence in school leaders and their children's teachers.

You have a clear vision for the school. You have encouraged teachers and pupils to work together to deliver high-quality leadership and education. Your staff feel valued, trusted and part of the school improvement process. Pupils are encouraged to engage with leadership in the school through the 'Senate'. You encourage the elected pupils that make up the 'Senate' to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work and contribute to further development of school policies. Pupils are aware of the contribution that they can make through the 'Senate'; they express their views and opinions confidently.

At the last inspection, you were asked to increase the level of challenge provided for the most able pupils. Inspectors also identified that disadvantaged pupils' progress needed to improve. The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are now being challenged and achieving at a higher standard. There have also been

clear improvements in the overall rates of progress for other disadvantaged pupils. However, this positive improvement is not reflected in all subjects. The progress of disadvantaged pupils in English and languages remains an area for further improvement. Consequently, while the progress of disadvantaged pupils is showing improvement, it is still below the progress made by other pupils nationally.

During the previous inspection, the behaviour of pupils and the evaluation of the impact of the actions taken to improve behaviour were an area for improvement. The strategies that you have put into place to improve behaviour have clearly been effective. Behaviour logs demonstrate that incidents of less than good behaviour are few. The proportion of pupils who are temporarily excluded from school has reduced to well below national averages.

You and your leaders have evaluated the school's current strengths and areas for development accurately. Since the last inspection, you have made changes to ensure that pupils make better progress. These changes include: some improvements to the assessment systems; a new structure for checking on the quality of teaching and learning; and strengthening the leadership of the sixth form.

Pupils continue to make good progress in their learning. In mathematics, history and geography, pupils achieve particularly well, making progress that is better than that of pupils with similar starting points nationally. Your assessment systems give you a clear picture of the progress of individual pupils' performance in all their subjects. This allows you to act quickly to support pupils when they fall behind in their learning. This does not, however, give you a strategic overview of the performance in subject areas or for groups of pupils.

You have created a culture where teachers work together to develop their teaching. They have opportunities to observe each other and to share good practice. Consequently, teachers are motivated and feel that they can adapt their teaching in a supportive environment. Teachers say that this approach to improving teaching has made them more reflective and open to change.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and value the school's history. They appreciate the beautiful surroundings and understand that many other schools do not have the same high-quality facilities. You have created an ethos where pupils embrace and value the school's traditions. Current pupils respect the achievements of their predecessors and are encouraged to excel as a result.

The school's record of sporting prowess and pupils' strong cultural development have been sustained through a rich variety of extra-curricular activities. Those pupils who do not enjoy sports as much can access a wide range of clubs that take place regularly. These include drama club, band practice and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) club.

Safeguarding is effective.

All arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place and effective. Staff are well trained in matters relating to safeguarding and are vigilant in ensuring pupils' well-being and safety.

Leaders have forged strong relationships with outside agencies and use these partnerships effectively to support pupils whose circumstances could make them vulnerable. As a result, these pupils are well catered for and are successful while in your care.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They are particularly knowledgeable about keeping themselves safe online. Pupils have produced their own video about online safety. The video won a local film festival award and has been used by several local schools to help their pupils understand the dangers of social media.

Inspection findings

- A key focus for this inspection was pupils' progress in English. In 2016 and 2017, pupils who took the GCSE examination in English made weaker progress than their peers nationally. Disadvantaged pupils made particularly weak progress in English, well below that of other pupils nationally. You have tackled underperformance in this subject. You have successfully recruited a number of new English staff, which has strengthened the department. Pupils' progress in English is improving.
- Your assessment systems clearly demonstrate that current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, in Years 7 and 8 are now making much better progress in English. The way that you collect information on pupils' progress in the upper years makes it difficult to get a clear overview of how different groups of pupils are progressing in English in Years 9 and 10. You were, however, able to demonstrate that there has been some improvement in the progress made by Year 11 pupils.
- The teaching of literacy is not consistent across all subjects. You have appointed a new leader for literacy and reviewed the strategy for next year. Currently, teachers support the development of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar well for pupils who enter the school with high starting points, but not as well for other pupils. Teachers use different approaches, depending on the subject that they are teaching, to develop writing skills. Some of these approaches are effective and others less so. As a result, the development of pupils' literacy skills is patchy across the school.
- Pupils' progress in languages has dipped since the previous inspection. As a result, you have made significant changes to the languages curriculum; pupils now study French and Spanish. More pupils are now opting to take a language at GCSE and some have the opportunity to take two languages. Pupils are now making better progress in this subject.
- In 2017, the most able and disadvantaged students in the sixth form did not

make good progress in their advanced level academic subjects. You have put a new leadership team in place in the sixth form. The actions that leaders have taken have brought about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form. Current students are now making better progress.

- Leaders ensure that there are appropriate courses for students who do not have pass grades in GCSE English or mathematics. Students achieve good grades in the English and mathematics resit courses, which have close to 100% pass rates, well above national averages. School assessment data demonstrates that this continues to be a strength of the sixth form.
- The new sixth form leaders have correctly identified the areas for improvement in the curriculum and have developed appropriate plans to effect change. Students said that they like being in the sixth form and that they enjoy the extra-curricular opportunities. Their satisfaction with their sixth form education is reflected in their high levels of attendance.
- The current system for tracking students' progress does not always effectively identify underperformance for different groups of students. Leaders have made improvements to the system for the coming academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently demand higher standards of literacy across the curriculum to support the development of pupils' writing skills
- improvements in the teaching of languages are embedded so that pupils make better progress from their starting points
- they use the high-quality assessment information that they have available more strategically in the upper years to review the progress of groups of pupils across different subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and some heads of department. I met with three representatives of the governing body, including the vice-chair of the governing body.

Inspectors observed two assemblies and one tutor period. Together with senior leaders, inspectors observed teaching in a number of curriculum areas. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and also examined the quality of work in the books of eight current pupils across a range of subjects. We also spoke to a selection of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. We spoke to pupils informally and observed their behaviour around the school and during lessons.

Inspectors examined a range of documents, including: safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' performance and attendance; and the pupil premium statement. We reviewed the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan. Inspectors also reviewed the school's website for relevant information.

Inspectors reviewed the 221 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 173 responses parents submitted to the free-text service. Inspectors took into account the 66 responses to the staff questionnaire. No pupils responded to the pupil survey.