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Mr Gavin Ball
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Dear Mr Ball

Short inspection of The Kings of Wessex Academy

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 2018 with David Herbert, 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 March 2015. The school had also received a monitoring inspection in October 2017 which looked at the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your team are working hard to deliver a shared vision for care and inclusion, alongside academic achievement. There is an ethos where, as one parent stated, 'pupil well-being is as important as results'. This vision is steadily becoming a reality. Achievement, particularly in the main school, remains strong. Pupils' progress is significantly above average across a wide range of GCSE subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. Your expectation and aspiration for curriculum breadth and challenge remain high. Over three quarters of pupils typically follow an EBacc programme and in 2017 over two fifths of pupils secured this benchmark. Your bold ambition is for a coherent, comprehensive, high-quality education for pupils across the trust schools from the age of two to 19. The Kings of Wessex Academy is increasingly playing its part in securing this ambition. Stakeholders' views of the school, sometimes rooted in long-standing perceptions from the past, are also changing for the better.

There are a few areas of the school's work which you have identified for further improvement. While girls' progress has been especially strong, boys' has lagged a little behind, although it is still above the national average overall. Likewise, in the sixth form, students' progress, while in line with the national average, is not as strong as in Years 9 to 11. Lastly, achievement in modern foreign languages (MFL)

at GCSE was notably lower than in other subjects in 2018. This followed a similar pattern in the previous year. Leaders and governors have identified inconsistencies in the MFL curriculum as pupils move from middle schools to The Kings of Wessex. You and your staff are already taking action to improve continuity in language provision across the trust.

The areas for improvement from both the last full inspection in 2015 and from the monitoring inspection in 2017 are all being tackled successfully. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils rose dramatically in 2018, and the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing quickly. The contribution of middle leaders to improvements is also growing, particularly through the recently established house system. The increased emphasis on pupils' pastoral support and their welfare and well-being is a thread that runs through much of the school's work. Developing effective feedback to pupils about their work has also been a strong feature of recent work. You recognise that the time is right to consolidate, review and establish these recent changes.

During this short inspection, we agreed to focus on a small number of important areas of the school's work. Firstly, we considered how well the school is supporting pupils' welfare and well-being through the pastoral system. Secondly, we looked at the extent to which subject leaders are contributing to improving teaching and achievement throughout the school. Lastly, we considered how effectively leaders are working to raise achievement in the sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders continue to ensure a strong focus on safeguarding, building on the strengths seen at the monitoring inspection in October last year. Staff at all levels have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and any concerns about children are tackled promptly and rigorously. Record-keeping is thorough and detailed and training for staff is up to date and of good quality. There is a culture of openness and transparency and an absolute focus on the well-being and safety of pupils.

Overall, pupils' absence from school remains higher than for secondary schools nationally. This is especially the case for persistent absence, which, although affected to some extent by pupils with medical concerns, is not yet improving quickly enough. Nevertheless, the new 'house' system has improved accountability for attendance and there are signs that leaders' actions are increasingly effective.

The total number of fixed-term exclusions also rose last year, although it remained below the national average. The increase was due to leaders' raised expectations for pupils' conduct and a refusal to accept behaviour which disrupts learning. As with attendance, a new approach to managing behaviour (known as 'ready to learn') has been introduced, linked to revised provision for internal exclusion and pupil welfare. The early signs of this approach are promising; fixed-term exclusions are much lower than in the same period last year, as are referrals to internal exclusion. However, it will take time for these approaches to attendance and

behaviour to become fully established.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' welfare and well-being are at the heart of the school. Following your appointment, you have made clear the importance of pupils' pastoral care and have strengthened provision significantly in this area. You and your team have not shied away from decisions which you believe will address many of the pressures that young people face in their lives. An example of this is the recent ban on mobile phones in the main school. Many parents, in their written comments to inspectors, made clear their support for this approach.
- Behaviour around school is typically good natured and pleasant and the school provides a safe environment for pupils. Despite a number of narrow corridors and tight spaces, pupils' behaviour is usually sensible and safe. Behaviour at the end of school and on buses is generally good. Pupils are confident that bullying will be tackled where it occurs and that staff will take incidents of bullying very seriously. Appropriate actions are taken where bullying occurs, including outside of school.
- The student welfare and inclusion team are helping to meet the individual needs of pupils well. Patterns in information about behaviour issues are being used more effectively to identify where support is needed. However, pupils believe that behaviour issues are not always managed consistently, and you agree that new systems will take a while to become established.
- You are deeply committed to distributed leadership throughout the school, especially in subject areas and for pupils' pastoral support. Subject leaders are growing into their roles and senior staff are supporting the development of their skills and confidence well. Subject leaders are able to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in teaching accurately, identifying, for example, effective questioning, appropriate challenge and helpful feedback about learning.
- All subject leaders make an important contribution to curriculum review and quality assurance. However, although the approach is thorough and systematic, it does not have enough impact on improving teaching. Many of the checks made are to do with adherence to policy and expectations. While this is helpful to ensure consistency, it is not yet getting fully underneath the factors contributing to pupils' progress. For example, leaders' reviews of pupils' work do not always evaluate clearly enough how well the curriculum is being implemented and learned.
- You have broadened the range of opportunities and courses in the sixth form. Students are now able to choose from a range of level 2 and vocational options, alongside A-level programmes. This is increasing participation and raising the proportion of students completing their courses successfully. Students welcome the improvements to the enrichment programme, including the introduction of a varied range of sporting and community opportunities, including mentoring younger pupils. All students undertake work experience and participate in other forms of work-related learning.
- Students appreciate the good-quality careers advice and guidance they receive,

including for course options and subject choices. The school has maintained its successful track record in supporting students' applications to higher education and to Russell Group universities. This is complemented by advice and guidance for other routes, such as apprenticeships and further education destinations.

- The support for students' welfare and well-being in the sixth form, including for mental health, has been strengthened. Closer attention is paid to students' attendance and staff act quickly if this begins to decline. A revised programme to develop students' skills for work, life and study has recently been introduced, although students say this varies in its usefulness. They say they would welcome more academic guidance and feedback about their progress.
- Outcomes in the sixth form in 2018 were similar to those in recent years. Overall, progress was in line with the national average, with some improvement for students with lower grades at GCSE. However, fewer students reached the highest grades at A level than might be expected based on their results at GCSE. Expectations of the most able students have not always been high enough. Leaders in the sixth form have reviewed students' target grades to ensure that they are more aspirational and challenging.
- Teaching in the sixth form has a strong emphasis on written feedback to students about their work. While this is often helpful and encouraging, the balance between the use of written comments and timely, targeted, verbal feedback is not quite right. Some of the approaches to written feedback and student responses are not fully effective in raising achievement, despite the time commitment from staff to provide them.
- This imbalance particularly affects the most able students. In some cases, diagnostic and detailed feedback for students aiming for A and A* grades is more difficult to provide in a written form. By contrast, in mathematics staff have developed the use of diagnostic assessment to identify exactly the type and pitch of work that students need to be successful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- fully establish all recent changes to expectations, systems and procedures across the school
- raise achievement in modern foreign languages by strengthening the continuity of the curriculum with partner middle schools
- further improve the impact of middle leaders by placing a greater focus on learning in leaders' checks on teaching
- improve attendance by building on actions to increase accountability through the house system
- review the approach to providing feedback to pupils and students so that it is efficient and effective in improving learning, particularly for the most able.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of

trustees, 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

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held discussions with you, your senior team and with other members of staff. We met with two governors and an inspector attended part of the Camelot House Remembrance Service. Inspectors spoke both formally and informally with pupils at times throughout the school day and also met with a group of sixth-form students. We looked at school improvement planning, leaders' monitoring records and at the school self-evaluation summary. An inspector scrutinised safeguarding records and looked at evidence of how well the school manages any concerns about bullying and pupils' welfare and safety. Along with staff from the school, we visited classes to observe learning and looked at examples of pupils' work. We considered responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with a group of community partners. The responses of 53 members of staff to a staff questionnaire were also considered.