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Mr Richard Evans
Principal
Fakenham Academy Norfolk
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Dear Mr Evans

Short inspection of Fakenham Academy Norfolk

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2019 with Nicola Hood, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The two areas for improvement were to raise progress, especially in mathematics, and further improve the quality of teaching and learning. There has been progress in both these areas. Since that inspection, there has been a recent change of principal. Following the departure of the previous principal, governors took time to ensure that they selected a new leader who met the needs of the school. As a result, there was interim leadership during the past academic year, provided by the executive principal of the multi-academy trust (MAT) on a part-time basis and the school's two assistant principals. During this interregnum, academic standards continued to rise and pupils' progress increased.

You took up your post in September 2018. As a result of a previous falling in the school's roll and having to adjust the budget as a result, leadership has become concentrated in a small number of staff. Insufficient accountability is required of those directly responsible for the delivery of individual subjects. To implement your vision for an outstanding school, a wider range of leaders need an even sharper understanding of the information they already have about the progress of pupils and groups of pupils.

We found the school to be a very calm, well-ordered and friendly environment. Working relationships between staff and pupils are very good. In the sixth form, students spoke to inspectors enthusiastically about the support they receive. This is both in their studies and in their applications for their next steps in higher education, apprenticeships or employment. Staff morale is high.

Only a small number of parents and carers responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, but of those responding very nearly all would recommend the school and all but one said their child was happy at school.

Safeguarding is effective.

All statutory requirements are met. The members of the safeguarding team are knowledgeable and work well together. Staff work well with external agencies. They rigorously pursue external agencies to ensure the welfare of their pupils. Training for school staff is comprehensive and regular, including for the 'Prevent' duty (the government's anti-extremism programme). Pupils are aware of the dangers of radicalisation and displays around the school warn of the signs of extreme right-wing affiliation. As the number of pupils increases, more staff are being trained for safeguarding leadership. Pupils and sixth-form students feel safe. This is largely because the school is 'very friendly'. Leaders are continually reviewing and improving the physical security of the site to ensure that this is robust. Bullying happens occasionally, but if it happens it is usually dealt with well and the incidence of bullying has reduced.

Inspection findings

- In order to check that the school remains good, I followed some key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to ensure that the curriculum provides pupils with a broad and balanced education that allows them to flourish. Leaders and governors are proud of the breadth of the curriculum offered to pupils. Pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form engage enthusiastically in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, art, music, drama, humanities and languages.
- Through a time of reduced pupil numbers and in turn fewer staff, leaders have ensured that pupils enjoy a wide choice of subjects at key stage 4. In the sixth form, leaders have adopted strategies such as co-teaching of Year 12 and 13 to retain a wide range of subjects with small numbers of students, such as music and drama. Financial constraints provide a continual challenge to this wide offer.
- The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, along with the promotion of fundamental British values such as democracy, tolerance and the rule of law, is very thorough. Pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain is a priority for the school. These areas are covered through 'learning for life', and this programme is complemented by assemblies and tutor time. The school works well with external agencies and employers. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils benefit from two weeks' work experience in Year 10.
- Those responsible for careers education and guidance have closely analysed the school's provision against the Gatsby benchmarks (the government's expectations for careers provision) and this shows how provision has improved over time and how the school is well on its way to meeting all of the benchmarks. There is very well-planned provision from Year 7 to Year 13 in work-related learning.
- Stronger relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff result from a

range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits. For example, all of Year 12 and Year 13 have the opportunity to make a trip to Auschwitz. In response to this visit, one student wrote powerfully in the visitors' book: 'I promise to be the best lawyer I can be so that things like this can never happen again.'

- Religious education and learning about different faiths are well planned for each year group. Sometimes, the religious perspective in ethical and topical issues gets lost. Pupils are introduced to different cultures found in modern Britain, for example through the popular Chinese food week. Some pupils feel there is too much emphasis on extremism and elements of sex and relationships education and not enough on financial education.
- The proportion of pupils entered for the EBacc, the suite of subjects favoured by the government, each year is low. This is largely because relatively few pupils opt to take a modern foreign language GCSE. Leaders have decided not to coerce pupils into taking a foreign language. They are, though, reviewing the nature of language provision at key stage 3 in the hope that the result will be a greater uptake at key stage 4.
- My second line of enquiry was in response to last summer's GCSE examinations. Overall, pupils made progress that was at least as good as that of other pupils nationally. However, especially in mathematics and science, some pupils who attained highly at key stage 2 did not make the progress they should have done by the end of key stage 4. Leaders have analysed and identified the reasons for this and restructured the teaching programme. They have done useful work to improve teaching and learning to provide better challenge. However, the level of challenge during lessons does not consistently build on prior learning, especially for pupils with prior high attainment. Consequently, the stretch is provided by extra activity rather than pitching the work highly enough.
- In the sixth form, leaders are working to reduce the variation in progress between the least and best performing subjects. Students are highly appreciative of the support they are given. Many students gain places at highly regarded universities.
- Finally, while behaviour is generally very positive around the school, among the small number of fixed-term exclusions, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities appear to be over-represented. We investigated the reasons for exclusions and found the sanction was justified by the seriousness of the conduct. We found examples of highly effective work to improve attendance and attitudes to learning. Work with individual pupils and their families has had a demonstrably positive impact.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leadership is strengthened so that middle leaders:
 - have greater responsibility for the delivery of the curriculum, determining the most appropriate steps that will enable pupils of all abilities to make the strongest progress
 - are held accountable for the impact of the curriculum on pupils' outcomes
- leaders are sharper and more rigorous in using the information they have to check the impact of actions to bring about further improvement
- they build on existing work to make sure that provision for pupils with high prior attainment enables them to make strong progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, leaders, teachers and other staff, the chair and members of the governing body, a group of pupils and a group of sixth-form students. We, with you and a senior leader, visited many classes to observe teaching and check behaviour. We observed pupils around the school and in social areas. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record. We also considered the 25 responses to Parent View, and the 55 responses to the staff questionnaire.