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Mr Paul Frazer
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Dear Mr Frazer

Short inspection of Desborough College

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019 with Paul James, 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is increasingly popular, and you and your leadership team have the overwhelming support of parents, who value the strong culture of respect that is so evident in the pupils' attitudes. Parents speak positively about the support and guidance that their children receive. A typical comment from a parent responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire said, 'The teachers really know how to bring the best out in boys and develop and encourage them in the right way.'

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, and they show respect and kindness towards each other. 'The Desborough Way' philosophy encourages pupils to develop a strong set of moral values. As a result, pupils behave well both in and out of classrooms. They take pride in their work, and pupils report that bullying is rare. One parent commented about her son, 'He is caring and sensitive, and the school nurtures these characteristics through their Desborough- Way philosophy.' Consequently, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain, an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.

Pupils' progress in mathematics and science is particularly strong, including that of the most able pupils. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and high-quality questioning ensures that pupils understand fully how to improve their work. Teachers' high aspirations lead to pupils being challenged to achieve the highest standards. As a result, in 2018 GCSE mathematics pupils made significantly better progress than the national average.

Leaders recognise that not all subjects are equally strong. Variations in the quality of teaching in English, modern foreign languages, business studies and history still exist but subject leaders' actions are leading to improvements. Accordingly, the pupils' rates of progress in these subjects are improving. For example, in English, pupils are using grammar more accurately in their writing than previously. Furthermore, pupils have a clear and precise understanding of how to improve their work. Leaders have improved the progress made by pupils in history, geography and French since the previous inspection.

In the sixth form, leaders have responded quickly to a dip in the performance of pupils following vocational courses and you have made curriculum changes to ensure that current students are able to be more successful. The strong links developed with Newlands School are helping to broaden the sixth-form curriculum further. For example, students are able to take a qualification in medical science. Students in the sixth form value opportunities to take on positions of responsibility and they are proud to be part of the school.

You have ensured that pupils have opportunities to experience a broad curriculum. In addition, the range of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils is extensive. Whether pupils are interested in sports, creative arts or academic pursuits, there is something for everyone. Furthermore, pupils and students are able to experience many trips and activities beyond school, for example day trips to local theatres and overseas trips to Austria and Spain.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit of purpose. Leaders ensure that all staff and governors are suitably trained and aware of their responsibilities. The link governor for safeguarding routinely checks safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are compliant. Parents are highly positive about the school, and the vast majority state that their children are happy, safe and very well supported.

An overwhelming majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they feel safe in school. This was confirmed through pupils' interviews, and discussions with pupils both in lessons and during breaks. Pupils reported that bullying is very infrequent, and that staff deal with it carefully when it occurs. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and they are aware of the risks of cyber bullying and radicalisation. Sixth-form students are supported effectively. They value the opportunities to be well-being ambassadors. Furthermore, the 'Headstrong' group supports students' mental health well.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, the inspection team looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the behaviour and attitudes of pupils; the progress made by middle- and higher-attaining pupils; the variations in the outcomes between

subjects; and the challenge that governors and leaders provide to the school, including the sixth form.

- Pupils are respectful towards each other and staff. Pupils were very courteous to inspectors during the inspection. Leaders set high expectations of behaviour. As a result, pupils behave well, both in lessons and around the school site, and they listen attentively to teachers. The inclusion room, 'Turnaround,' is effective in supporting pupils to modify their behaviour. Consequently, leaders' actions have been effective in significantly reducing the number of fixed-term, including repeat, exclusions.
- Middle- and high-ability pupils make very good progress in subjects where teachers' expectations are high, for example in mathematics. Nevertheless, variations remain in the rates of progress that pupils make between subjects. Not all teaching and learning is of the same high quality. For example, occasionally, tasks are not matched well enough to the ability of the pupils. A minority of teachers do not check pupils' knowledge thoroughly enough to know whether pupils understand their work. However, the majority of pupils are set challenging targets, and they know their targets and they reach, and often exceed, their targets. As a result, the progress of all groups of pupils is improving. Leaders recognise that improving the outcomes for all groups of pupils remains a priority.
- Inspectors looked at how well leaders are addressing differences in the outcomes between subjects. Subject leaders have implemented rigorous monitoring processes, and they have increasingly high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Subject leaders have identified actions required to improve pupils' progress further. As a result, pupils understand well how to improve their work and they are making stronger progress. For example, in science the partnership with Radley College has led to significant improvements for pupils.
- Governors provide effective challenge to leaders in the sixth form. Governors make sure that measures are in place to ensure that students are taking appropriate courses that enable them to be successful. Leaders have analysed thoroughly the reasons for the slight decline in some subjects at A level, most notably in English and computer science in 2018. They have acted to remedy the decline, and, as a result, students' progress is likely to be in line with that of pupils with similar starting points nationally this year. In addition, leaders are continuing to seek opportunities to offer a broader range of courses for students, especially through their joint sixth-form provision with Newlands School.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for pupils in all subject areas are at least in line with those of other pupils nationally
- teaching and learning across the curriculum is of an equally high standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Windsor and Maidenhead. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Lee
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior team, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and one other governor. They observed learning in 25 classes, jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and reviewed a sample of pupils' work, including disadvantaged pupils' books from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors took account of the 155 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also took account of the 38 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey. They met with groups of pupils, representing Years 7, 9, 11, and 13, and considered the 76 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' achievement and attendance, safeguarding information, policies, the school website and minutes of governors' meetings.