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Mrs Deborah Bunn
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bunn

Short inspection of Fairfax

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019 with Tracey Lord and Graeme Rudland, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 January 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, together with governors, trustees and the senior leadership team, have an accurate understanding of the school's performance and use this to identify strengths and priorities for improvement. You have helped to develop an inclusive school, where there are high expectations of what all pupils can achieve and where every individual pupil receives strong levels of support, guidance and care. You provide strong leadership and, supported by the senior leadership team, you are continuing to make improvements. In addition, trustees and members of the local academy association bring significant experience and expertise. They support the school effectively and hold leaders to account.

The pupils we spoke with said that they enjoy school. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Pupils attend regularly. Overall attendance and persistent absence are in line with the national averages. Most pupils make good progress across a wide range of subjects. They have good attitudes to their work and are well behaved. There is real commitment from pupils to the school's motto 'sinceritas laboris' (dignity in hard work) and this was seen in lessons and in pupils' books. The progress made by groups of pupils is carefully checked in all year groups and there are targeted interventions for groups that are underperforming.

You are proud that the school is so inclusive, and that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are effectively supported to integrate fully in the school community. The school's commitment to sustaining a broad,

inclusive curriculum, along with ensuring that all pupils understand your core values, enhance the inclusive nature of the school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically of the different activities and events that they take part in at different times of the year, both during the school day and outside of school hours, particularly the Eisteddfod, the school's annual festival of arts.

The quality of teaching is mostly strong. There is a purposeful and productive atmosphere in almost all lessons. In classes, pupils are ready to learn, and routines are clearly in place. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and are making good progress.

The previous inspection report highlighted the need for the school to carry out more detailed and frequent evaluation of the impact of strategies used to support the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders were also recommended to ensure that prompt action was taken when strategies to support disadvantaged pupils were judged to be less effective. The monitoring and evaluation of the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils is now strong. Leaders have also reviewed monitoring and evaluation practice in other areas of the school. This has led to improvements, although the full impact of changes has yet to be realised.

While most groups of pupils make strong progress, the least able have performed less well in some subjects, especially mathematics, science and humanities. All groups of pupils have underperformed in modern foreign languages. The school has made the improvement of standards in this faculty a priority. Changes have been made and new practices have been introduced, but it is too early to see their full impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school because of the effective systems that are in place. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school uses an online referral system, in which all members of staff have received training. Serious concerns are escalated to social services and other organisations.

Well-trained team members work closely together, recognising that issues in behaviour, attendance and SEND feed into a deeper understanding of how to keep children safe. All staff have received appropriate training across a range of areas, including the risks associated with keeping pupils safe from extremism.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe from a variety of risks and, as a result, they feel safe in the school. It is a strength of the school that the pastoral system encourages trust and that all pupils feel valued. Bullying is very effectively dealt with and many pupils act as anti-bullying ambassadors.

Inspection findings

- The school has a rigorous assessment practice. Four 'data drops' during the year lead to senior leaders and heads of faculties drawing up lists of pupils who need

extra support and intervention. A personalised programme of support is then worked out. Senior leaders need to ensure that all pupils and not just those who are underachieving benefit from plans drawn up from the analysis of assessment information.

- The school has revised the modern foreign languages curriculum at key stages 3 and 4. It is now more challenging. In Year 11, smaller groups for boys have been introduced, with positive results. In-school assessment information suggests that there have been improvements in pupils' progress this academic year. Books mostly show that pupils make the progress they should over time and that lessons have appropriate levels of challenge. Schemes of learning in modern foreign languages now promote the use of effective questioning. The head of faculty of another school in the trust has worked actively with the school's staff. The strongest teaching which inspectors observed included a substantial use of the target language. It is too early, however, to see the full impact of the changes.
- Teachers write notes for themselves about groups and individuals in a 'teacher feedback' book. This is so their subsequent teaching is informed and that actions can be put in place. Where practice is strong, these books are used very effectively, notably in English, where their use led to personalised interventions.
- Although teachers have received high-quality training aimed at improving teaching, learning and assessment, the messages need to be more effectively embedded in order for them to become part of all teachers' practice. Teachers' questioning is not consistently as effective as it could be and challenge is not always appropriately matched to pupils' abilities. The least able pupils, in particular, struggle to absorb challenging information because it is not well matched to their needs. The school's monitoring and evaluation systems are not as effective as they need to be in highlighting inconsistencies in classroom practice.
- Senior leaders regularly quality assure the work of faculties and this has led to changes being introduced where subjects are underperforming. A new course has been introduced in information and communication technology and computer science. The school's internal assessment information indicates that key stage 4 pupils are making better progress than in previous years.
- The key stage 5 curriculum has been reviewed and, as a result, the school has introduced vocational courses appropriate to the needs of some students. Course entry requirements have been revised in all subjects so that students are now following appropriate programmes of study for their prior attainment. Because of this, according to internal assessment results, students are making improved progress in the sixth form, especially in mathematics and the sciences.
- There is consistent practice in teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form, with a cycle of 'teaching, assessing, evaluation with suggestions for improvement' and this was clearly seen in almost all lessons. Students fully support and value this way of learning. Because of these and other changes, students have become effective independent learners.
- There is a more detailed and frequent evaluation of the impact of strategies used

to support the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Key appointments in staffing have been made so that the needs of disadvantaged pupils are better served. An attendance officer works closely with pupils and their families and attendance has improved to 92.6%.

- Staff with responsibilities for numeracy and literacy have worked with key stage 3 pupils and the new raising attainment and aspirations of pupil premium students coordinator has done so with key stage 4 pupils. In-school assessment information shows that literacy and numeracy levels have improved at key stage 3 and that at key stage 4 disadvantaged pupils are making better progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with curriculum developments to improve the progress of all pupils and students
- consistent and effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment is embedded across the curriculum in all key stages
- the school's monitoring and evaluation systems result in plans that lead to strong outcomes for as many pupils and students as possible.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local academy association, the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Buckle
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team met with you, senior and middle leaders, members of the local academy association and the board of trustees and with pupils both formally and informally. We made visits to lessons to observe the quality of teaching and learning, sometimes accompanied by senior leaders. Pupils' work in books and folders was evaluated and we talked to pupils about their learning. We considered the 106 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and we took into account 97 responses to the staff questionnaire. We evaluated school documents, including information about pupils' progress, safeguarding information and the school's self-evaluation and development plans.