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Patrick Cozier
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cozier

Short inspection of Highgate Wood Secondary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2016 with Jeff Cole, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, focusing sharply upon the areas identified for improvement.

You, leaders and governors know the school well. Your evaluation of the school's performance and strategies put in place are accurate and appropriate, allowing leaders and staff to continue raising standards quickly. As a result, teaching is good and improving, as are behaviour and attendance. The very few remaining weaker departments receive effective support through the school's professional development system. Leaders' work rapidly improved the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes last year at GCSE and A level, including in geography and drama. There is good consistency in the way teachers use assessment. Effective feedback across subjects helps pupils to understand how they can improve. Part of the strength of the school's feedback policy stems from the significant staff involvement in forming it. It also reflects effective work by middle leaders, who monitor teaching and the impact of whole-school systems to closely track pupils' progress against aspirational targets.

As a result of your work since the last inspection, pupils' performance overall is good and improving at GCSE and A level. There is very little difference in groups of pupils' progress from their different starting points. Disadvantaged pupils make progress that exceeds that of other pupils nationally. However, your analysis of assessment information accurately identifies that disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys, make secure progress but that their attainment lags behind that of their peers.

In January 2016 you introduced a new behaviour policy which included improving procedures to underpin your raised expectations for pupils' behaviour. Staff, parents and pupils recognise that improved clarity about rules and systems has improved behaviour following a period where you rightly considered it to be slipping. Behaviour incidents, including those leading to internal referrals and exclusions, have reduced as a result, including for disadvantaged pupils. However, you recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure consistency in the way that all staff apply the new procedures and how pupils adhere to them.

Governors provide robust challenge and support to you and your senior team, scrutinising your work to ensure that you address effectively the remaining areas for development. Their work supports leaders' accurate evaluation of the school's performance and plans for further development. The recent 16 to 19 study programme review is a good example of how leaders and governors have been proactive in their work to secure higher standards in the sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff and pupils' actions and interactions demonstrate a strong culture of safeguarding which is built upon a secure foundation of effective training, external links and policies. For example, much work is done with pupils to teach them about e-safety and cyber bullying, which pupils told inspectors has made them feel much safer online. Lessons and assemblies that provide pupils with opportunities to think about rights, respect and tolerance for others lay the foundations for what makes pupils feel safe at this school. One pupil told the inspector that 'we're all just people', when reflecting upon how pupils get along no matter what their background. Parents, staff and pupils agree that this is a safe school and that pupils' welfare is a priority. The school welcomes support from the local authority, which includes checking the school's safeguarding procedures.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. This includes improvements in quality and consistency in teachers' feedback on pupils' work, which was an area for improvement in teaching at the last inspection.
- Teachers plan lessons well, stretching the most able and targeting pupils' needs. Skilful questioning and well-chosen activities mean that most pupils make good or better progress in their subjects and across year groups.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including students in the sixth form, make good progress overall. However, improvements in their attainment lag behind their peers. Disadvantaged boys with average or better starting points when they join the school attain less well because teachers do not consistently plan to accelerate their progress.
- Leaders have focused upon improving the curriculum at key stage 3 so that pupils can hit the ground running. Leaders aim to improve pupils' skills at an early stage, and thus reduce the need for extra help and intervention later on. This recent development is already showing signs of improving pupils' progress, particularly for those requiring additional support and for disadvantaged pupils.

- Pupils read well and with confidence. Those requiring additional support benefit from extra reading support, including online checking of key literacy skills. Leaders routinely review this support to further enhance the impact upon pupils' learning across the curriculum.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes have recently been reviewed to ensure that the school is able to offer quality provision to all of its students. Subsequently, the number of work-related subjects on offer has been reduced because leaders concluded that other options would better suit students' needs. These changes have been combined with effective careers advice and guidance, which mean that students now study the courses most appropriate for them, either at this sixth form or elsewhere after Year 11.
- Recruitment into the sixth form has increased and the vast majority of students complete their study programmes. Pupils in Year 11 consider the sixth form to be a good option for their subsequent education, which leaders feel is a reflection of how far the sixth form has come. Students' destinations reflect the academic focus of the sixth form, but students are still well informed about apprenticeship and other training routes.
- In 2015 students' progress at AS level was weaker than at A level. External analysis of the school's 2016 16 to 19 study programme outcomes indicates far stronger progress at AS, and improved performance at A level. In particular, students studying biology, chemistry, geography and psychology made very good progress as a result of leaders' prompt and incisive support.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was reviewed two years ago, and this has resulted in improvements. Inspectors noted that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress across year groups and demonstrate confidence when participating in classroom discussions. This is reflected in last year's GCSE outcomes for this group of pupils.
- The new behaviour policy resulted in an increase in the number of exclusions and internal referrals last year. This year there is a marked reduction in the number of times referrals are made to the internal isolation room, and the number of exclusions overall. Fewer instances of poor behaviour involve disadvantaged pupils or pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, improving a historical trend.
- Pupils told inspectors that inconsistency remains in the way some teachers apply the new procedures. Leaders also reflect that behaviour across the school is yet to consistently meet their higher expectations at social times; it is not as strong as pupils' consistently good behaviour in lessons.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and persistent absence has reduced. This is because leaders have developed more stringent procedures to follow up with pupils whose attendance has fallen, or is at risk of falling, below expectations.
- Pastoral leaders work effectively with the local authority and educational welfare officer. This supports the school's robust attendance system. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is now close to that of their peers, while additional bespoke work supports pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers plan more effectively to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys with average or higher starting points, so that they make better progress towards the best possible outcomes
- the behaviour policy is fully embedded, all teachers apply it and pupils follow it so that behaviour improves still further.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- how leaders are working to improve disadvantaged pupils' performance, particularly that of boys from average or better than average starting points
- what leaders are doing to sustain and improve behaviour and attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- what leaders are doing to improve students' performance in 16 to 19 study programmes, particularly that of disadvantaged students and in subjects that have performed less well.

Inspectors carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- Inspectors visited 15 lessons jointly with members of the senior leadership team. While observing learning, inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and discussed pupils' progress with them. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors met with staff, governors and pupils and held a telephone conversation with the local authority's head of school standards and performance.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and development planning; policy and procedure documents; assessment and behaviour information; the record of pre-employment checks made on staff; records of governors' meetings; and the headteacher's reports.
- Inspectors considered the views of 191 parents, 38 pupils and 56 staff who responded to Ofsted's surveys.