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Mr Michael Holland
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Dear Mr Holland

Short inspection of Hartford Church of England High School

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2018 with Andrew Shakos, 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 2013.

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 other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, set and promote the values of the school with clarity and consistency. Your confident, caring and outward-looking leadership and your aspirational expectations for pupils are understood, shared and valued by pupils, parents and carers, and staff alike. Consequently, large numbers of them responded to Ofsted's questionnaires at the time of the inspection. The overwhelming majority were positive about the school and how you lead it. Accordingly, the school is highly regarded by the community and routinely receives more applications for places than are available for pupils.

You know the school very well, so your self-evaluation of the school is precise and accurate. Your plans to address the few areas that need to improve are appropriate and understood by all. As a result, since your last inspection you have built upon the school's strengths and led improvement in its few areas of weakness. You and other school leaders are aspirational and forward looking. Consequently, you are consistently improving the standard of education provided, including through investment in high-specification facilities for pupils. For example, you have recently provided a 'state-of-the-art' 3G sports pitch and are part way through a building programme which will ensure that pupils are taught in a high-quality and carefully designed environment.

Pupils say that they are generally taught well, and so they make good progress. This matches the view of parents and staff, and that of inspectors when they looked

at pupils' work. Accordingly, pupils' examination outcomes at the end of key stage 4 have been in line with the national average across a broad range of subjects since the last inspection. You accurately say some variation remains in the challenge teachers set pupils in their work, within and between subjects. Inspectors heard from school leaders, including those responsible for governance, of the plans underway to eradicate any inconsistency.

You have introduced systems that regularly monitor and evaluate the progress that pupils make, across year groups and subjects. Consequently, you know where pupils' progress is strong and where pupils or groups of pupils are not making the progress that they should. The measures that you put into place to support these pupils are precise and effective. For example, many disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than was the case previously, and the small number whose progress remains slower are in sharp focus.

You and other staff know the pupils well. Inspectors noted the positive relationships between staff and pupils. Staff, including senior leaders, routinely speak with and listen to pupils. Consequently, pupils are courteous and confident. They behave well typically, and overall their attendance figure is above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is closer to that of similar pupils nationally than was the case previously and continues to improve.

Pupils' transition from primary school to Year 7 is managed well. The Year 7 pupils that we spoke to during the inspection were positive about how they have settled in to the school.

Governance is effective. Governors have skills and experience that support effective governance and they use these to support and challenge the school's senior leaders effectively. Those responsible for governance actively promote the school's vision and have a clear understanding of the educational standards at the school and their role in supporting further improvement where required. They are effective in maintaining the school's financial well-being and ensure that money is spent wisely and ambitiously, for example in improving pupils' environment and facilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

You ensure that staff are charged with prioritising pupils' safety and well-being and that they know them well. You maintain a culture of vigilance in staff and pupils. Staff are regularly updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. Recently, this has included training on radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Procedures to recruit staff safely are established. The school site is safe and secure. Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and most of their parents agree. Pupils are happy and cared for well. They are aware of risks because of regular teaching on how to remain safe and stay healthy. For example, they understand how to keep

themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet. Bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, is rare and staff deal effectively with any incidents. Pupils' emotional health is supported routinely and effectively. For example, during the inspection, key stage 4 pupils listened attentively to an assembly focusing on 'the seven habits of highly effective teenagers', which provided strong messages to further support their mental well-being.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered during the inspection was how effectively teachers set work that challenges pupils, so that they make the progress they should. The pupils' work that we saw matched your own self-evaluation. Most pupils make good progress and attain the challenging targets that you and other leaders set. You use pupils' starting points from key stage 2 to set pupils' targets. The progress that pupils make towards these is measured regularly and accurately, so teachers and leaders know how well pupils are doing. Consequently, most teachers regularly set work that challenges pupils. When pupils meet or exceed these targets, teachers review and raise them so that they can set work which engages and stretches the pupils still further. However, you and those responsible for governance are aware that in some areas variation remains. Sometimes, pupils are not set challenging work and on these occasions their progress is not as strong as it is usually. Accordingly, this is an area where you are working to eradicate any inconsistencies.
- The second focus area was the effectiveness of school leaders in ensuring that disadvantaged pupils attend school regularly and make the progress that they should. You and other leaders, including those responsible for governance, monitor and evaluate these aspects regularly and accurately. Consequently, you have a precise knowledge of the current position, strengths and weaknesses of disadvantaged pupils' attendance and progress. You use this information to good effect. Plans which you have put in place are sharply focused and have led to sustained improvements. As a result, the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils across a broad range of subjects are stronger than was the case previously. For some groups, such as girls, they are in line with those of similar pupils nationally. Where there are any variations currently, such as in the progress of a small group of disadvantaged boys, you and other leaders are aware and have plans in place to support these pupils to catch up with their peers. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance, although not yet in line with that of other pupils nationally, is improving rapidly.
- The third area we looked at was the curriculum provided for boys to test if it matched their needs and interests, particularly in English and key stage 4 option subjects. Boys enjoy their English curriculum. The written work seen by inspectors, especially the frequent extended writing, was of a strong standard, because the work that they are set interests them. Boys' spelling, punctuation and grammar are especially good. In English literature, boys are engaged by the texts chosen by teachers, so their attitudes to learning are strong.
- You plan and review the subjects that boys study carefully and ensure that the qualifications that they gain are aspirational and in their best interests. You are

insistent that the courses that pupils follow at key stage 4 prepare them well for their next steps in education and are not those which are not in pupils' best interests but over-inflate school performance scores. Consequently, we found that, at key stage 4, boys are interested and successful in the courses that they choose to study. The work that we saw in these areas demonstrated strong attitudes to learning from boys and their examination outcomes are good. Many boys opt to follow academic courses at key stage 4 and move on successfully to A-level study, including in courses that prepare them for university entry. Pupils, including boys, also have opportunities to follow vocational courses that match their requirements. Outcomes in these courses are good. The curriculum that boys follow prepares them well for their next steps in education, employment and/or training.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils continue to improve and differences from those of other pupils nationally are diminishing
- pupils are always set work that matches their starting points, so that variation between and within subjects is eradicated.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we visited lessons, looked at the work in pupils' books with senior leaders and spoke with pupils about their experience of lessons, behaviour and safety. Inspectors held meetings with school leaders and those responsible for governance. We spoke with representatives from the Diocese of Chester and the local authority. We looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation, development plan, attendance and behaviour records, pupil premium plan and safeguarding records. We considered the views of the 144 parents, 346 pupils and 62 staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires.