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Mr John Panayi
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Dear Mr Panayi

Short inspection of Hedingham School and Sixth Form

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Vanessa Love, 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 May 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 your senior leadership team have demonstrated determined and dedicated leadership. This has ensured that the school has consolidated and enhanced the strengths identified at the last inspection, and worked successfully to address the areas for improvement which were identified then.

A new appointment at leadership level, following the 2013 inspection, addressed some of the areas identified for improvement around teaching and learning. The impact of the increased leadership capacity was evident as inspectors visited lessons with members of the senior leadership team. Standards of teaching have continued to strengthen. There is a purposeful and productive atmosphere in almost all lessons. Teachers create and sustain positive relationships with pupils. Pupils listen attentively to teachers' explanations and feel safe to ask, and answer, questions about their learning.

Pupils in all year groups talked confidently about their learning, and knew how well they were doing and what they had to do to improve. Pupils told inspectors that feedback from teachers is most helpful when they are given the opportunity to respond to it, for example in English and science. Pupils' books confirmed the effectiveness of feedback in these areas and showed clear progress, especially at GCSE. Indeed, the significant improvement in science results since 2014 is

something you are rightly proud of. Information on how well pupils are doing is used effectively by teachers to ensure that all pupils are challenged. This is, again, most effective at key stage 4 and demonstrated by the progress that your Year 11 pupils made in 2016, which was significantly above that of other schools nationally.

Pupils spoke to inspectors with confidence and were welcoming and polite. Their behaviour around the school, in often crowded corridors, was orderly and calm. They took turns at narrow doorways, showing consideration for the needs of others. Pupils enjoy school. As a result, they attend regularly; overall attendance is higher than the national average and persistent absence is lower. Pupils enjoy school because they feel valued and well cared for. Pupils and their parents are very positive about the welfare support provided by the school. Parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire left many comments saying how well the school has supported their children to reach their potential. It is clear from visiting lessons with senior leaders and talking to pupils that, despite the size of the school, your young people are well known as individuals.

Your sixth form students are enthusiastic about the experience they have had at Hedingham. They appreciate the support they get from the sixth form support assistants as well as their teachers, saying that it is 'the staff that make the difference' and describing them as 'brilliant'. Students further develop the good learning habits instilled in them at key stage 4, showing inspectors well-organised work folders and demonstrating the discipline to use independent study time effectively.

You, the governors and the school's leadership team have an accurate understanding of the school's current position. The school's development planning identifies the right areas for further improvement and reflects your prompt response to the disappointing 2016 outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at key stage 4 and vocational outcomes for students in the sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders ensure that staff are well informed and trained about new safeguarding guidance through regular training and updates. Staff understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils said that they feel safe and parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are kept safe in the school. Pupils said that there is very little bullying in school but know that it will be taken seriously if they report it and that 'it is always sorted quickly'. They also feel that they have someone to talk to in school if they are worried or concerned about anything. The school helps its pupils to keep themselves safe by organising days when learning is focused on issues such as drugs and alcohol awareness. Pupils told inspectors of the positive impact of a day last year when a visiting group raised their awareness of the dangers of extremist views and radicalisation.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Your governors fulfil their statutory duties to ensure that pupils are safe in school. For example, they ensure

that the recruitment process for new staff is rigorous and that all necessary checks are carried out.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remains good, one of my main lines of enquiry was to look at the progress that your disadvantaged pupils make. In 2016, outcomes for your disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 4 were below those of other pupils nationally. You are very aware that these outcomes were not as high as they should have been. You have put in place a range of strategies to support the learning of your disadvantaged pupils, such as weekly mentor meetings with a member of the senior leadership team and extra English and mathematics teaching. You are also extending support during the summer examination period this year to maintain a focus on revision and preparation for your disadvantaged pupils to help them to cope effectively with a busy examination schedule.
- Information on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make during key stage 3 shows that not enough of these pupils catch up with their peers before they begin their key stage 4 courses. When disadvantaged pupils start in Year 7, their attainment is well below that of other pupils. Their progress is monitored effectively and support is provided for those who fall behind. Currently, this is not accelerating their progress at a rate that will allow them to achieve in line with other pupils.
- Another key line of enquiry focused on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans make good progress at the school and in 2016 made better progress by the end of Year 11 than other pupils. However, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs but who do not have EHC plans is more variable. You have addressed this, partly, by reviewing the number of subjects this group of pupils will take at key stage 4 and designing a new pathway for current Year 9 pupils. This will enable them to concentrate on securing better grades in fewer subjects. You also provide extra literacy and numeracy support for these pupils early in key stage 3. Teachers are now using information on how well these pupils are doing in their lessons to adapt their teaching to meet their needs more effectively.
- A dip in outcomes in 2016 for your sixth-form students, especially those on vocational courses, followed a three-year upward trend. I, therefore, wanted to see how the school had responded to this. In particular, you have made a new appointment to review and oversee improved vocational provision. You see this as an important way forward for Hedingham sixth form to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its students, especially those who choose a vocational rather than an academic path. The sixth form also provides an interesting and varied programme of study for students, which includes opportunities to work with local businesses. Students told inspectors that the quality of the advice and guidance available to those who do not choose to go on to university has improved. Some academic subjects, such as art, geography and psychology, continue to provide students with strong outcomes at A level.

- You are also keen to ensure that the curriculum you offer your pupils at key stage 4 meets their needs. Pupils choose from a variety of academic and vocational options. Pupils say that they receive useful advice and guidance about which subjects to study at GCSE. You are aware that outcomes in optional subjects are not as consistently strong as they are in the core subjects and so you have created the opportunity for your middle leaders to share good practice in regular meetings. Subject leaders also have to account for their outcomes to senior leaders and governors. There are clear strengths outside the core subjects: more pupils in design and technology, French, and media studies achieved a C grade or above in their GCSEs in 2016 than other pupils nationally.
- Your teachers have fully embraced and effectively managed the many challenges resulting from the changes to both GCSEs and A-level qualifications over the past two years. Consequently, expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly at GCSE, have risen. In the light of this, you have recognised the need to increase the level of challenge for your key stage 3 pupils so that they are ready to meet the demands of the new GCSEs. In English and mathematics, your middle leaders are re-evaluating their key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that it is robust enough to do this – good practice that you are keen to ensure happens in all subject areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- robust support for disadvantaged pupils is put in place at key stage 3 to accelerate their progress so that they catch up more rapidly with their peers and improve their attainment at GCSE
- the curriculum at key stage 3 offers the right level of challenge so that all pupils are well prepared to meet the higher expectations of the new GCSEs in all subject areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team met with you, your deputy headteachers, other members of your senior leadership team and members of the governing body. We also spoke with a group of your middle leaders, including your leader of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We visited classes with both of your deputy headteachers and your head of sixth form where we observed pupils learning and talked to them about their work and their school. In lessons, we looked at pupils' work in books to determine the quality of learning over time and the quality of learning across the curriculum.

We met with two groups of pupils and spent time speaking informally with pupils in class and at breaktime. I scrutinised: the school's documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with young people, the school's own evaluation of its performance and your plans for its improvement.

I also considered the 171 responses to Parent View which included 75 free-text comments and the views of the two parents who contacted Ofsted during the inspection.