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Dear Nicki Edwards

Short inspection of The Gryphon School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2017 with Ofsted inspectors, Benjamin Antell and Malcolm Davison, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since you took on the role of headteacher in June 2017, you have brought renewed focus and energy to the school's drive to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is as strong as it can be. Because you were previously a deputy head in the school, you understand how to build on the good work of your predecessor. Over the last year, the school has been at the heart of setting up a multi-academy trust. Inevitably, this had taken up significant time and energy of school leaders. A new leadership structure has been implemented in the light of the birth of the new trust. Your role, focusing entirely on The Gryphon School itself, has given new impetus to continuing to improve the quality of teaching.

You are well supported by your senior leadership team. Together, you have a very clear and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your plans for improvement are ambitious but pragmatic. Together with your senior leadership team, you have developed a coherent and thoughtful model to further develop middle leaders across the school. Middle leaders meet with senior leaders regularly to discuss the progress that pupils are making and the quality of teaching in each subject. Meetings are well structured and help middle leaders to focus on key issues. Middle leaders feel motivated and energised by this approach.

Your development of the 'extended leadership group' means that middle leaders and other staff have the opportunity to take on broader leadership roles across the school. In this way, you make good use of the skills of talented teachers to raise the quality of teaching across a large number of classrooms and you develop teachers as leaders. You are also sending a clear message to colleagues that you value the skills and commitment of your staff in your drive to further improve the quality of teaching. This is already having an impact, and teachers are responding positively to the challenge.

Governance has also been reorganised as a consequence of the formation of the multi-academy trust. A number of governors on the local governing body are new into role. The formal arrangements for ensuring that leaders are held to account are in place but have not yet had time to work through in practice. Leaders, trustees and governors are working together to ensure that the transition does not lead to a dilution of accountability.

You have a clear understanding of the school's performance at GCSE. The leadership team recognises that there has been some variability between subjects and is successfully addressing this. The quality of teaching in English has improved significantly. Inspectors saw evidence in pupils' books of good progress over time as a result of challenging and thought-provoking work set by teachers. There is a similar picture in the humanities and science. You have also made substantial improvements to the quality of teaching in languages. Previously, pupils had made less progress here, but improvements in leadership have led to subsequent improvements in teaching. The quality of teaching in mathematics is not as consistently good. There are pupils making good progress as a result of teachers challenging them to think about complex problems, but this is not universally the case and so some pupils are not achieving all they might.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that keeping pupils safe from harm enjoys a high priority across the school. Pupils feel cared for and know whom to go to if they have any concerns. They said that they feel safe and parents agree. There is a strong culture of supporting vulnerable pupils across the school. Staff know their pupils well. Leaders invest considerable resources in ensuring that staff are trained to a high level. Pupils and parents agree that instances of bullying are infrequent and are dealt with well if they occur.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's recruitment procedures are good. All appropriate checks are carried out and detailed records kept. The school's very careful tracking of pupils' individual case files enables staff to intervene appropriately if needed.

Inspection findings

Since the previous inspection, pupils have generally made good progress. In most years, they have made more progress than in the majority of schools nationwide, although there was a dip in 2016. Rates of progress returned to being above

average in 2017. Disadvantaged pupils did well in 2015 but then achieved poorly in 2016. In 2017, they made progress in line with that of other pupils nationally. Results in the sixth form had stagnated since 2014 before a slight rise in 2017. We therefore agreed to focus this short inspection on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make and on the performance of the sixth form. We also considered the breadth and balance of your curriculum.

- Leaders ensure that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is given an appropriately high priority across the school. Teachers know that leaders are keen to ensure that these pupils make similar rates of progress to other pupils. They use a good range of techniques to make sure that disadvantaged pupils play a full and active part in their lessons. For example, they make sure that these pupils are targeted with challenging questions when class discussions are under way. As a result of these strategies, disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in their lessons.
- Leaders also provide extra support for disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 as they prepare for their examinations. This includes additional homework clubs and residential activities. Pupil uptake is monitored and an assessment made of the impact of these interventions. As a result of this package of measures, some pupils made very significant improvements in their performance in the period leading up to their GCSEs. Leaders have also organised interventions for younger year groups. Some Year 7 pupils are making very strong progress with their literacy skills as a result.
- While disadvantaged pupils generally make good progress in their lessons when they are in school, the attendance rate for some pupils remains too low.
- In 2017, while disadvantaged pupils did achieve a progress score broadly in line with other pupils nationally, this was achieved in part because a number of these pupils took an additional, low value, qualification alongside their GCSE or equivalent qualifications. However, school leaders are now focusing on ensuring that pupils achieve as well as they can in their GCSE or equivalent qualifications.
- In 2017, there was an upturn in the progress that students made in the sixth form. Students are making good progress overall. Progress is improving as a result of good teaching by subject specialists. Teachers' expectations are high. Students have very positive attitudes and they are eager to take an active part in lessons. They are keen to redraft and improve their work by paying attention to teachers' feedback.
- School leaders have recently restructured the leadership of the sixth form. The current leadership is strong. It is providing clear direction and a focus on improving standards. Leaders are aware that achievement in vocational subjects is weaker than in academic subjects. Improving this is a focus for the new leadership team.
- A feature of the sixth form is the high number of students joining Year 12 from other schools. Students reported that the transition is made easy by good relationships with staff. When students complete their studies, many go on to prestigious universities. An increasing number are also now pursuing higher-level apprenticeships.

- The curriculum from Year 7 to Year 13 is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all pupils. A particular feature is the development of 'nurture groups' in Years 7 and 8. Pupils who might otherwise struggle are given the additional support they need to succeed. There is a strong focus on improving literacy and key skills so that they can play a full part in all their lessons. This is proving to be very successful. Pupils make rapid progress, and the groups are popular with pupils and parents. However, these pupils do not study a modern foreign language. Leaders are aware of the dilemma of narrowing the curriculum in this way and they provide an opportunity to study a language where appropriate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are embedded consistently across all subject areas by continuing to develop the work of middle leaders
- disadvantaged pupils make good progress in all year groups, including in the sixth form, by continuing to improve the quality of teaching they receive and by improving their attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, Ofsted inspectors Benjamin Astell, Malcolm Davison and I met with you, senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. We visited lessons to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including your own self-evaluation and improvement plan. We also looked at safeguarding and attendance records, and the use of the pupil premium funding. We took into account 111 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, 108 written comments by parents and responses to questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.