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Peter Cole and Ben Riggott
Co-headteachers
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Dear Mr Cole and Mr Riggott

Short inspection of Highfields School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Lynn Cox, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school's governing body set up your joint leadership in September 2016. Since then, you have made creative use of the flexibilities of this arrangement to improve school leadership, teaching and learning, and pupils' progress. Governors are well informed about school life and provide you with a good balance of support and challenge. Governors hold you to account well.

You believe that all pupils can – and should – achieve highly. You communicate this belief very clearly to all who learn and work at the school. Your high expectations have a positive impact on the culture of the school. Pupils know and understand the school motto, 'Be the best you can', and they want to succeed. Pupils enjoy coming to school and benefit from the many educational and enrichment opportunities they have. Extra-curricular opportunities are extensive and varied, particularly in music, dance and drama.

Staff and pupils told me that the '5 Rs' approach to managing behaviour at the school really works, and supports teaching and learning well. You have identified further improvements you will make to promote good behaviour, including increasing pupils' compliance with school uniform rules.

Leaders and governors also intend to further improve support services for pupils

who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have produced clear plans to bring about these improvements.

Senior leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders and governors have ensured that middle leaders are fully involved in improving the quality of teaching and learning. You have done this by building trust with middle leaders and providing them with the support they need to improve teaching.

Leaders have nurtured the school's many strengths, including those in the sixth form. Many pupils want to stay on at school and join the sixth form because they have great confidence that teachers will help them to achieve their ambitions. Leaders have ensured that good practice in the sixth form and in high-achieving subject areas, such as English and humanities, is widely shared. This collaborative approach has helped improve teaching.

You are tackling the minor weaknesses of the school. This includes improving the attendance of girls, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders also recognised that disadvantaged pupils' progress needed to improve and took robust action to make this happen. Leaders' actions have led to improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils, though you know there is more to do to ensure that they consistently achieve their potential.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders have made sure that there is a strong, shared commitment to safeguarding across both school sites. School leaders have developed an 'attachment aware school', where staff understand the impact that early trauma has on children. This training has helped school staff to offer effective support to pupils.

Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to support pupils who are at risk of harm. School leaders have ensured that pupils understand the dangers of child sexual exploitation and other local risks. Parents are very positive about the quality of care and support their children receive. Pupils told inspectors that there are adults they can turn to when they need help and support. Pupils feel safe at school and leaders' records show that bullying is rare. Leaders are developing their approach to tackling the infrequent instances of bullying, strengthening the effectiveness of this aspect of safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- Middle leaders now play a key role in improving the quality of teaching and learning at the school. Senior leaders support subject leaders well in this work. Subject and pastoral leaders make skilful use of the school's systems for tracking

pupils' progress, and this helps leaders to identify which pupils need extra help. Helped by more effective actions from leaders, pupils' progress is improving.

- Middle leaders set high standards for themselves and those who work with them. Subject leaders make sure that the quality of teaching is their top priority. Leaders support other teachers to develop their teaching skills well. Middle leaders from all departments work together to improve teaching; this means that staff in the highest-achieving subjects share good practice. Subject leaders also work with teachers from the 'Peak 11' group of schools, to ensure that the assessments teachers make of pupils' work are accurate.
- The sixth form is well led. Sixth-form leaders ensure that a high proportion of pupils stay on at the school and complete demanding 16 to 19 study programmes. Teachers set sixth-form students high examination targets and motivate students to achieve these goals. Sixth-form students make very good progress and achieve examination results that are similar to national averages in academic subjects and above national averages in applied subjects.
- School leaders have put in place ambitious, realistic plans for further sixth-form improvements. Currently, leaders and teachers are further increasing the challenge in lessons, to help students achieve more A and A* grades. Local employers are closely involved in supporting the post-16 careers programme; students benefit from this innovative employer involvement.
- Pupils' attendance at the school is around the national average. However, the attendance of girls, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been low. You have taken firm action to improve attendance. Pupils' recent attendance records show that there has been significant improvement in the attendance of girls. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has also improved, but is still too low.
- School leaders are aware that they exclude disadvantaged pupils from school more often than school leaders nationally exclude pupils. Disadvantaged pupils' exclusion from school contributes to their low attendance. During the inspection, we also agreed that sixth-form students were absent from school more often than younger pupils and that sixth-form attendance also needs to improve.
- The school's records and pupils' work show that leaders' efforts to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are having a positive impact. School information shows that many disadvantaged pupils are now achieving well. However, you and the school's governors agree that these improvements are not yet consistent in all subjects and year groups. For example, disadvantaged pupils' progress in science is not good in all year groups.
- In the past, too few disadvantaged pupils went on to suitable placements at sixteen. This is no longer the case. Almost all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, now go on to suitable placements at the age of sixteen.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils make consistently good progress in a wide range of subjects, including science
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and sixth-form students improves.

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

Yours sincerely

Ellenor Beighton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other members of your leadership team to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection. I held a meeting with middle leaders, where we discussed the impact of their work to improve the quality of teaching, and pupils' safety. I met with governors to discuss arrangements for pupils' safety and the governors' priorities for improving the school. My colleague spoke to a group of key stage 3 pupils about their safety and what it is like to be a pupil at this school. We also spoke to pupils during informal times. We scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and the school's own assessment of the progress it is making. We undertook observations of learning across the school, including observations with the joint headteachers and other school leaders. I spoke to local authority representatives about the school's strengths and areas for development. I spoke to one parent on the telephone. We viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I analysed the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, and the 114 free-text responses from parents and 80 staff questionnaires.