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Miss Emily Beer
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Dear Miss Beer

Short inspection of Willingdon Community School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 2017 with Charles Joseph, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since arriving in September 2016, you have reinvigorated your school team. Your enthusiasm, passion and drive to improve pupils' outcomes have made a real difference because you have identified clearly where improvements need to be made. You have accelerated the pace of change to ensure that actions have a positive impact on your pupils. Your fresh approach and collaborative style have helped leaders to reflect on the effectiveness of provision and pupils' well-being. The governors are equally ambitious and have restructured their committees to ensure that they evaluate and challenge school leaders more efficiently. You have welcomed and benefited from the support of your local authority representative during your first year of headship.

There is an organised, calm and positive ethos throughout the school, which is enhanced by strong relationships between staff and pupils. Staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct and, as a result, pupils are well behaved, respectful and friendly to one another. Behaviour continues to be typically exemplary and there is a culture of inclusion across the school.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers planned lessons to match the ability of the pupils

in their classes, enabled pupils to understand fully what they were learning and helped pupils to improve their writing skills. In addition, inspectors asked leaders to focus on evaluating the impact of teaching on learning and to share best practice to improve pupils' progress across subjects.

Leaders have subsequently taken effective action to address these recommendations. There is a whole-school focus on continual training and reflection for teachers. Middle leaders regularly share interesting teaching practices in science, maths, music, art, and design and technology to improve teaching and learning. Your school teams draw on the expertise from both within school and the wider educational community to establish effective strategies to improve classroom practice. Consequently, teaching is improving. Pupils are able to explain clearly what they are learning and in the strongest of lessons they can also talk about their progress over time and what they need to do to further improve. However, this is not as consistent as you would like it to be.

Since joining in September 2016, you have revised the school's teaching and learning policy, target-setting process for pupils and quality assurance programme of teaching. Staff apply the school's teaching and learning policy well. You and your team of senior and middle leaders regularly check on the quality of learning and pupils' progress. This whole-school focus on improving pupils' progress is having a positive impact on teachers' planning and pupils' understanding. Pupils are now more actively involved in their learning; they take more pride in their work and enjoy their lessons. Your new target-setting process ensures that the most able and low-prior-ability pupils are suitably challenged by appropriate tasks. Leaders' analysis of the progress of groups is helping to identify any boys, girls, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who are not meeting their targets. Your team knows that this new system still needs time to be embedded across the school.

Leaders identified that weak literacy skills are the main barrier to success for many of your pupils. Your whole-school literacy programme includes developing pupils' love of reading, while enhancing their oracy and improving their writing skills. This has been adopted by many curriculum areas. Inspectors saw, in the majority of lessons visited, strong questioning and pupils actively contributing to their learning. This reflective approach to learning, in line with your new school teaching and learning policy, is helping boys to improve their confidence, as well as reinforce their knowledge and understanding. This was especially obvious in the music and design and technology lessons we visited. Governors have visited the school to review the impact of this revised literacy policy on pupils' achievement. They agree with you that the whole-school literacy programme is having a positive impact but further work is still needed to embed the practice in order to improve pupils' literacy levels.

In 2016, pupils' overall achievements at the end of key stage 4 were broadly in line with national averages. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, made strong progress in both science and mathematics, achieving outcomes above others nationally with similar starting

points. However, disadvantaged pupils have not made the same rapid rates of progress in other subjects. You rightly see the progress of disadvantaged pupils as a whole-school priority.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Specifically trained safeguarding staff ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff receive safeguarding training periodically throughout the year to keep up to date. Governors routinely check that all processes and policies meet requirements and that school records are thorough and complete.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and feel safe at school. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe at school. The school's work in educating pupils about the risks of drugs, alcohol, child exploitation and e-safety takes a high priority throughout the academic year. Pupils say that bullying is rare but is dealt with effectively should it occur. They are confident about who to go to if they have a concern.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; pupils' attendance; the quality of learning in English and humanities; and pupils' achievement, including that of disadvantaged pupils and boys.
- You have correctly identified that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve. You have introduced relevant interventions to Year 11 and you are now developing a team of individuals to work with families to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism across the school. This is beginning to have a positive effect on some vulnerable pupils and their attendance has improved as a result. However, you recognise that there is still work to be done to build relationships with families of disadvantaged pupils to further improve the attendance of these vulnerable groups of pupils.
- English outcomes in 2016 were not as strong as in previous years. Your English middle leader is working to rapidly improve the quality of teaching in this area and you have ensured there is a strong team of English teachers. Your pupils benefit from a dedicated team of English teachers who have a clear understanding of the new curriculum. The majority of English teachers provide useful feedback to pupils which helps them to improve their work. However, you are acutely aware that some boys and disadvantaged pupils are not making the rapid advances they need to at key stage 4. While your team's programme of intervention is helping to reduce the gender differences, more is needed to improve the outcomes of boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Some pupils join the school with low literacy levels and this area of weakness is affecting their ability to access the curriculum. While your work with the literacy coordinator to improve pupils' ability to read, interpret, analyse and write well is

supporting most areas of the curriculum, this is yet to have an impact on some geography and history classes. You are continuing to work with coordinators within these areas to improve the outcomes of pupils and ensure that planning and resources are appropriate for pupils' ability.

- You have rightly identified that disadvantaged pupils make more progress in science and mathematics than in other subjects. Leaders responsible for disadvantaged pupils recognise that more needs to be done from Year 7 to quickly identify which interventions are accelerating pupils' knowledge and understanding. Leaders also need to routinely review how additional funding is supporting those disadvantaged pupils who are achieving in line with expectations. Governors are keen to review more frequently how additional funding is being spent and which pupils are benefiting from interventions. By doing so, leaders can build on the interventions that have the most impact on disadvantaged pupils' progress and ensure greater consistency across subjects and year groups.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they evaluate more carefully the impact of provision for disadvantaged pupils so that interventions have a positive impact on attendance and disadvantaged pupils make consistently strong progress across subjects and year groups
- pupils' literacy improves so that they can access the wider curriculum, including geography and history, in order to improve their outcomes
- boys' outcomes improve in English.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, the chair, vice-chair and representatives of the governing body. We met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. Inspectors met with the local authority representative. Inspectors visited 17 lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and members of the leadership team. We

looked at the school's documentation, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness, priorities for future improvement and your team's ongoing review /impact booklets, progress and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' minutes. We also checked the school's policies relating to safeguarding, the use of additional funding, including pupil premium funding, and the curriculum. Inspectors considered 133 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 86 responses to the staff questionnaire provided by Ofsted.