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Mrs Lisa Percy
Headteacher
Hardenhuish School
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Dear Mrs Percy

Short inspection of Hardenhuish School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with William Morgan and Mark Thompson, Ofsted inspectors, 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. The school leadership has tackled the issues for improvement which inspectors gave the school in 2013, particularly since you were appointed as headteacher some 18 months ago. You have shown by your ability to bring about positive change during that time that the school has the capacity to improve further.

Strengths of the school identified at the previous inspection included pupils' personal development and teaching. Pupils' personal development remains strong. To a large extent, this is testament to the high quality of care and support that the school provides. We, the inspectors, talked to several pupils and read questionnaires completed by pupils, staff and parents. I also read a large number of texts which parents sent to Ofsted. The great majority of parent responses were overwhelmingly positive about your staff's commitment and care for pupils and sixth-form students. Typical of parents' views were comments such as, 'I feel extremely fortunate to have such a supportive, inspirational and well-managed school on my doorstep,' and 'a terrific school, with a great team of enthusiastic and hard-working teachers and support staff.' I saw the quality of support for vulnerable pupils in the school's support and intervention areas.

Teaching has remained strong, and you have improved it further. It is the principal reason why pupils make good progress. Teachers have increasingly benefited from a good range of opportunities to develop their skills. They welcome your structured programme for staff development. Most of your staff teach with confidence and good levels of subject knowledge. You and other leaders have helped staff by refining assessment and tracking

systems so that they can successfully adapt their teaching to the varied learning needs of pupils and students in all phases of the school.

In order to resolve an issue from the previous inspection, the progress of different groups, you check the quality of teaching and learning more closely. You have developed more effective systems of tracking progress and using the information to make sure that particular pupils get the support they need in order to do well. This has resulted in improved progress, including that of less-able pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. I looked at detailed records of the extensive support given to some particularly vulnerable pupils. I and my inspector colleagues talked to several pupils and sixth-form students who said that they felt very safe in school. They said that when there were untoward incidents of bullying, the school dealt with them well. All sixth-form students have training in child protection, and pupils lower down the school are also taught how to be safe. Your staff pay particular attention to the mental health issues which have affected some students' learning.

The great majority of parents, carers and pupils believe rightly that the school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Any incidents of concern are logged meticulously and followed up. You and your staff work hard to achieve good levels of attendance.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure awareness of safety and highlighting potential dangers such as those posed by radicalisation. Staff confirmed to inspectors that they have had regular training in their responsibilities for safeguarding and how to exercise them. Similarly, governors have a good awareness of safeguarding and their responsibilities for it. The quality of safeguarding contributes strongly to pupils' enjoyment of school and their progress.

Inspection findings

- Safeguarding was the inspectors' first line of enquiry. The second was about the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in maintaining and building on the strengths of the school.
- Your evaluation of the school is very thorough and accurate. You clearly know the school's strengths and areas for development. Your resulting school improvement plan focuses on the right priorities. It is realistic and rigorous, with appropriate success criteria and a vision for how the school should move forward. It also details the necessary measures and staff responsibilities for each aspect of the plan.
- Your measures to improve progress of different groups, including less-able pupils, along with more rigorous assessment and tracking systems, have helped to improve progress.
- Governors play a key role in this process. They have improved their knowledge of what goes on in the school on a day-to-day basis, as well as sharing the leadership's vision. Governors were able to show inspectors how they have constructively challenged the leadership as well as supporting it. Governors are now more active in liaising with staff responsible for the various curriculum subjects and checking pupils' progress.

- Middle leaders also have a positive impact. They told me how they had become more accountable in their key roles of checking teaching and learning and supporting other staff. They welcome this increased accountability and share your ambition for the school to move on the path towards excellence.
- Our third line of enquiry related to the previous ones, because it focused on the achievement of different groups of pupils in key stage 4, especially the most able and disadvantaged pupils. It also focused on students in the sixth form.
- Your staff have ensured that pupils in key stage 4 make good progress overall. The school's records show this. Inspectors verified it by looking at pupils' books. The work of pupils in Years 10 and 11, especially of higher attainers, shows that they make good progress. There are occasional inconsistencies between different subjects or between boys and girls. Sometimes, for example, the quality of in-depth writing which pupils do in English is not replicated to the same extent in other subjects.
- Pupils attain standards above the national average by the end of Year 11.
- You acknowledge that there are still some inconsistencies in achievement and also that not all staff follow the school marking and feedback policy consistently yet.
- Over time, there has been a gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, in receipt of pupil premium funding, and other pupils. A gap remains, but it is narrowing as a result of the school's efforts to give appropriate support to these pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress.
- Most students in the sixth form make good progress. However, you acknowledge that there are still some differences in the rate of progress in different subjects, and that some girls do not achieve as well as they should, sometimes for health reasons. Most higher-attaining students make good progress, as do pupils lower down the school. However, you recognise that not all students who join the sixth form make the same level of progress. We know that you have been addressing this issue, as reflected in your improvement plan for the school.
- Our final line of enquiry concerned the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Historically, disadvantaged pupils have had a higher rate of absence than other pupils, most of whom have a good record of attendance.
- You have worked to rectify this. The school attendance officer and other staff work hard to improve attendance through various strategies, including offering rewards and trying to engage more with those parents who do not recognise the importance of their children attending regularly.
- As a result of these efforts, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved, with a positive impact on their learning. However, their attendance is still below average and it is one of your priorities for the school to improve attendance still further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school continues to improve the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils to bring them more in line with the attendance and progress of other pupils
- the school continues its efforts to further increase the rate of progress in the sixth form, particularly by reducing variability in achievement between subjects and between groups of students.

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

Yours sincerely

John Laver
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, two inspectors accompanied members of the senior leadership team in visiting many of the classrooms to observe learning and behaviour. Inspectors had meetings with you and other members of staff. Inspectors talked with pupils and sixth-form students.

I met five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I interviewed four middle leaders, responsible for key phases or individual subjects. I met with the member of staff acting in the role of managing provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

We looked at pupils' books in order to evaluate their progress over time. We also looked at information about the attainment and progress of pupils currently in the school. I looked at the school website and documents relating to safeguarding and attendance. I read the school's evaluation of itself and the school improvement plan.

We took account of 307 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I also looked at the numerous responses to both the staff and pupil questionnaires. I saw the school's own survey of parents' views. I read the large number of free-text parent responses sent in to Ofsted.