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Mrs K. Gunn
Principal
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Dear Mrs Gunn

Short inspection of Strood Academy

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2017 with Lizzie Jeanes, 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 June 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 know your school well and have worked hard at successfully addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection. You have identified the areas of weakness and are taking effective action.

Your determination to provide the best possible education for each pupil permeates your drive for improvement. You are well supported in this by staff and the governing body, who all share this passion. Together you have risen to challenges of changing national requirements, particularly the more rigorous curriculum. Teaching is increasingly effective. You have established a welcoming school environment that is a good place for pupils to be happy and learn. Pupils feel cared for and enjoy the range of facilities, school clubs and experiences they are offered. There is a sense of trust and mutual respect between pupils and adults and relationships are strong. One pupil summed up the views of those I spoke with: 'There is always someone here to help.' Tolerance to differences between individuals is evident; for example, pupils value the provision of the 'LGBT club'.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the school's many strengths in teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour. Three areas were identified for specific attention. The first was related to securing consistently strong progress in mathematics; the second was focused on improving pupils' speaking and writing in all subjects. The final one was to ensure suitably challenging work in lessons for

pupils of differing abilities, particularly the most able. Now:

- progress for pupils in mathematics has improved notably; achievement is increasingly sound, particularly in key stage 3
- teachers are effectively planning and delivering lessons that challenge pupils in their learning, so as to meet their differing needs and abilities, including those of the most able
- pupils make strong progress in English, and the use of reading programmes has improved pupils' confidence and performance in speaking and writing.

Your drive to improve attendance last year was not as successful as you had hoped. In response, you have taken further effective action. Consequently, attendance is improving. You acknowledge that you still have some way to go to meet your high expectations. Study programmes in the sixth form were not fully meeting requirements last year, most notably in the provision of work experience. This is now in place. However, as the programme is new, its effectiveness is still to be fully evaluated. You have also tackled weaknesses in science teaching. Current work, drawing on external expertise from Leigh Academies Trust, is helping drive further improvement. You recognise that teaching in humanities has not improved to the same extent as other subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have in place a robust safeguarding system that makes sure all pupils are secure. Procedures and detailed policies (which have clearly stated review dates) are compliant with statutory requirements, and records are detailed and of high quality. Your designated safeguarding leader is well supported by five deputies. Recruitment procedures are thorough.

Comprehensive and regular training of staff and governors, online and face-to-face, ensures that all are aware of their duties and responsibilities for pupils' safety. All staff know the signs to look out for that may indicate a pupil is at risk of harm. It is evident that a culture of safeguarding runs throughout the school. Pupils say that they feel safe. They are aware how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. Instances of bullying are rare. Leaders make good use of support from external agencies.

Inspection findings

- During the discussion with you and your vice principals at the start of the day, we agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included:
 - the extent to which leaders have been successful in improving attendance and reducing levels of persistent absence for all groups of pupils
 - how effective leaders have been in raising standards of progress and attainment for all groups of pupils
 - the effectiveness of mathematics and science teaching

- consideration of how successful leaders have been in improving behaviour
 - to what extent study programme requirements in the sixth form are met.
- Attendance has been a concern for the school, but data since September 2016 reveals an improving picture by all groups of students. Leaders and staff have worked hard in securing this improvement. Tracking and analysis of pupils' attendance is now tighter. Effective use is made of counsellors, family workers and agencies to develop constructive links with parents. The recently introduced weekly attendance rewards system is helping to motivate pupils to attend regularly.
 - Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, typically make good progress because of improved teaching and support. Leaders use additional government funding increasingly resourcefully. Having recognised that previous spending was not making enough difference to disadvantaged pupils' achievement, leaders wisely changed the approach. For example, the reading programme introduced in the last year has resulted in much-improved progress in reading for disadvantaged pupils with low reading ages on entry.
 - You set high levels of expectation to improve the quality of teaching. You have established 'Drive Teams', groups of leaders and teachers concentrating on improving the quality of teaching and progress of different groups of pupils, such as the disadvantaged or the most able. In addition, effective training for staff, the appointment of good-quality staff and support from Leigh Academies Trust are also helping to ensure that teaching is preparing pupils well for the new GCSEs. Challenge within lessons across all key stages is evident, increasingly effectively meeting the differing abilities of pupils, including the most able.
 - Teaching in English is an established strength of the school's provision. Progress by the end of key stage 4 has improved notably in recent years, and in 2016 it was above the national average. Pupils' achievement in mathematics and science is improving fast, particularly for key stage 3 pupils who achieve very well. However, due to previous weaknesses in teaching, outcomes in mathematics and science have been low and remain variable for current Year 11 pupils. You have addressed these weaknesses well, and are making sure these pupils are provided with as much support as possible to catch up.
 - You recognise that current pupils' achievement in history and geography is also too variable. Your success in improving teaching in other subjects makes you well placed to secure similar improvements in these subjects.
 - You have introduced a behaviour management system that is understood by staff and pupils. It has brought improvement in pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. Pupils commented that behaviour in the school has improved in recent years. Pupils typically settle to work quickly, work with focus and take pride in the presentation and care of their work. Low-level disruption is increasingly rare. Between lessons and at the end of break, pupils move with purpose; there are very few examples of tardiness. Pupils typically wear their uniform with pride.
 - The number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased and is lower than the national average. Repeat exclusions are also low. You have achieved this through

the introduction of an exit system, which sets clear levels of expectation, with associated consequences if pupils fail to meet them. In addition, your 'Inclusion Zone' provides a supportive environment for those pupils who may be at risk of exclusion. It has been successful in early re-integration of pupils to lessons.

- Study programmes in the sixth form now meet requirements. Previously, work experience was not a feature of life in the sixth form. Year 12 students are undertaking work experience this year. However, it is too early for leaders to determine the exact impact this will have on enhancing their studies, supporting their career decisions and in preparing them for life beyond school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- absence, especially by disadvantaged pupils becomes increasingly rare
- the quality of teaching in history and geography in key stages 3 and 4 is developed so that pupils make consistently strong progress
- the recently introduced sixth form work experience programme is evaluated and developed so that it plays a key part in preparing students for life beyond school.

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

Yours sincerely

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and the vice principals at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection.

Over the day, inspectors held further discussions with you and other senior leaders. I met with governors, and separately with the chief executive of Leigh Academies Trust, which Strood Academy joined on 1 January 2017. Inspectors, accompanied by you and senior leaders, visited 22 part lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders.

Inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires completed by 62 members of staff, 15 responses by pupils and 48 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered written comments completed by parents. One inspector spoke with pupils and staff at breaktime. She met with a group of pupils and students from Years 7 to 13 and separately with a group of

staff. Inspectors analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, and safeguarding policies and procedures.