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Mr Tom Rolfe and Mr Mike Earl
Heads of School
Hellesdon High School
187 Middletons Lane
Hellesdon
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Dear Mr Rolfe and Mr Earl

Short inspection of Hellesdon High School

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 2017 with Nicola Hood, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and continue to take action to improve it further.

Since the previous inspection, the leadership of the school has changed. There are now two joint heads of school who share responsibility and accountability for the overall leadership of the school. You are both supported well by your senior leaders and, increasingly, by your middle leaders. Together they are ensuring that standards of teaching consistently reflect your high expectations. Your staff are 'on board' with the changes that have been made since the previous inspection. The responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire emphatically support this view.

The atmosphere in your school is one of calm purpose. Pupils move around sensibly, demonstrating courtesy and respect for each other as well as to adults and visitors. In lessons, pupils behave well. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils are engaged in their learning. They participate well when teachers question their understanding and increase the challenge of the task.

Overall attendance has been broadly in line with the national average since the previous inspection. However, some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and some disadvantaged pupils do not attend regularly enough.

Parents are supportive of the school and value the quality of the education provided. A large majority of parents who made their views known to inspectors via the online questionnaire, Parent View, say their children are well looked after and make good progress at the school.

Governance, with support from the trust, is strong. Governors have the skills, knowledge and experience to support leaders and hold them to account. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses, and ask pertinent questions that rigorously challenge the range of information they receive. Governors have ensured that the school's website meets requirements and that safeguarding is effective.

You have redesigned the curriculum so that it provides a range of subjects and options that better suits pupils' needs. You identified that your previous curriculum had limited the progression of some pupils in such areas as languages and humanities. You are well aware that there is work to do to ensure that these changes are successfully embedded throughout the school.

The sixth form is small, especially in relation to the cohort sizes in the rest of the school. You explained that the sixth form, historically, has attracted less than half of the students from each Year 11 due to the nature of the academic offer available. You are now redesigning the curriculum for key stage 5 so that the pathways you are able to offer Year 11 pupils meet their needs and interests. Your aim is that this will enable more of them to benefit from the experience and strong teaching that exists in the sixth form.

In 2016, the achievement of students on A-level courses continued to be strong, with many subjects performing above national averages. However, the achievement and retention rates for the small cohort of students on applied courses were more variable. Governors and senior leaders are aware of this and are addressing these issues for the present Year 12 and Year 13 by providing more personalised mentoring and support.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. They receive up-to-date training and regular updates. Policies and procedures used throughout the school are robust. The policy clearly identifies the staff who lead safeguarding and how concerns can be raised. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. This aspect of the school's work is very well led.

Referrals are made promptly and outside agencies are used appropriately. The school keeps accurate and thorough records. As a result of a strong safeguarding culture, pupils, staff and parents feel that pupils are safe and are taught to stay safe in an effective way.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry was to see how leaders are securing good progress for key groups, especially middle-ability disadvantaged pupils. Information from 2016 GCSE examinations showed that these pupils made less progress than their peers.
- Your new leader responsible for disadvantaged pupils is ensuring that teachers understand the strategies they can use to raise the achievement of these pupils. Senior leaders plan carefully how funds will be spent and consider how the barriers faced by these pupils can best be overcome.
- Governors carefully question school staff about the ways funds are used and the outcomes achieved by these pupils. These strategies have contributed to disadvantaged pupils achieving in line with their peers in a number of subjects. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that progress is consistent across all areas of the curriculum.
- The second area I considered was the attendance of key groups of pupils. Information from 2016 showed that attendance for some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was below the national average. You explained what actions the school has taken to remove the barriers that often prevented these pupils from improving their attendance.
- You showed the impact of these measures on the attendance of Year 11 pupils last year. You have now expanded this provision to increase the impact on other year groups. Although there are early indications of success, the school acknowledge that this is not yet widely embedded. Consequently, the attendance figures for some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remain low.
- Where pupils' absence is more persistent, the school works with families and external agencies to provide extra support. The school has brought more of these facilities, for example counselling, in-house to allow students faster access to specialists who can work with them to improve their attendance. The impact of these measures, while seen on an individual level, has not yet led to a significant improvement in the overall figures.
- A line of enquiry was how well pupils are prepared for their transition into the sixth form. Your information shows that the majority of your pupils moved to other providers at the end of Year 11. Inspectors were able to see that the school provides high-quality impartial advice and information to pupils enabling them to make informed choices about their next steps. The school also employs an external provider to give pupils greater access to impartial careers guidance.
- Historically, the curriculum offer has meant many pupils have not chosen to stay on in the school sixth form. You discussed firm plans to widen the curriculum further to offer more vocational pathways alongside the present academic qualifications. You explained that this would build on the strengths and experience of the present sixth form but give present Year 11 pupils, and subsequent cohorts, more choice.

- The final line of enquiry I considered was how the significant changes the school has undergone since the last inspection have been communicated in school and with the wider community. Since the last inspection, the school has been instrumental in setting up a multi-academy trust. This has involved a number of changes at senior leadership level including the move from a more traditional single headteacher to two joint heads of school.
- Governors and staff are very positive about this style of leadership and how it benefits the school and the pupils. However, some parents who responded to the online parent questionnaire are not clear about the leadership structure of the school or the role of the trust. They say that communication between home and school is not as well defined as it could be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to raise attendance in significant key groups so that it is at least in line with the national average
- middle leaders use assessment information in a more precise way to ensure that teaching is targeted to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged and middle-ability groups
- communication within the school community improves so that parents, staff and pupils are clear about the positive work of the 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 Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Vanessa Love
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with the heads of school, assistant headteachers and a group of middle leaders. I met with two governors including the chair of the governing body. I also met with representatives of the Wensum Trust including the chief executive officer. We also spoke with pupils formally and informally. We made short visits to lessons and scrutinised pupils' work in their books. We considered 122 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We also considered 92 responses to the staff questionnaire and 83 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about managing teachers' performance and staff training records. Information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance

and safety was analysed. We also looked at the published information on the school's website.