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Mrs Natalie Waters
Headteacher
Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form Centre
Briar Mill
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Dear Mrs Natalie Waters

Short inspection of Droitwich Spa High School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017 with Patrick Amieli, 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. You, your leadership team and the governing body have a tenacious and relentless determination to provide the best quality education for all pupils. You offer a broad and rich curriculum. Pupils' life chances are your highest priority, and no matter what barriers pupils face you are determined all shall succeed. In 2016, most pupils made good progress in their GCSEs in subjects across the curriculum. Students who left in Year 13 made less progress than you expected though pupils taking AS levels and those studying vocational courses made better progress. You have made effective changes to the curriculum and timetable. For example, you have increased the time given to English and mathematics in key stages 3 and 4. You have set up what you call an 'access group' for pupils supported by the pupil premium. You have introduced a programme to teach leadership, organisation, resilience, initiative and communication. Inspectors could see that pupils are making good progress in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils speak very highly of the school. Parents' comments in Parent View are overwhelmingly supportive. In the Parent View responses, one typical comment was: 'This is a fantastic school and my daughter's progress has exceeded expectations since starting here. We have no problems with the school, its staff or pupils. If a child wants to learn and do well, this is a great school to be at.' You say in your ethos statement that: 'Good examination results alone do not define a school, any more than they define a person. There are many other opportunities here; we would like all who join us to find an involvement somewhere amongst them.' You place a high value on the wider school experience. At Christmas, for

example, you held a concert valued by all at which pupils took part in dance, drama, a fashion show, a gospel choir, a madrigal choir, ukulele group, and jazz band. You have an inclusion centre. Here, inspectors talked with pupils who looked after animals, took care of a woodland area, raised money through charity events and designed fitness activities. Your governing body is involved in the life of the school, coming in to learn first-hand from pupils and teachers about what is going well and what needs to be improved.

Your teachers are supportive of your leadership. They were eager to tell inspectors of the improvements you are making where most attention is needed, for example the progress of disadvantaged pupils in English, post-16 programmes of study and the relatively low attendance of some pupils.

The previous full inspection report asked you to work on the following:

- Improving the quality of teaching. Most pupils' progress in their GCSEs in 2016 and the progress made by most pupils in the school currently is good. So you are improving the quality of teaching.
- Improve social, moral, spiritual and cultural education. Inspectors could see that, for example, in the quality of your tutor programme and assemblies, pupils are learning effectively about other faiths, the values of our different cultures and how to be responsible citizens.
- Improve the effectiveness of careers education. You now have independent careers advice and guidance. Pupils told us how effective they find this. You have increased the proportions of pupils and students who go on to high-quality further and higher education, employment and training.
- Develop the quality of literacy. Most pupils make good progress in English. Inspectors could see how, for example in humanities, pupils are improving their skills of punctuation, grammar and spelling.

In 2013, you were visited as part of a 14-school survey by Ofsted of the quality of alternative provision. We reviewed the areas for improvement in this survey for your school. These included:

- Systematically analysing the performance of whole groups of students following alternative provision. Inspectors reviewed the progress of pupils for whom you offer alternative provision. These pupils are making good progress.
- Sharing data showing the impact of alternative provision with governors. You provide governors with a range of information about your use of alternative provision and this helps them decide on whether it offers value for money.
- Systematically supplementing the detailed information already given to providers about students with the strategies for teaching and learning. You make sure to liaise closely with your alternative provision partners, visiting them regularly and reviewing the impact of plans you have shared.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record, recruitment procedures, and records of actions taken to ensure the safety of at-risk pupils and found these to be effective. You train your staff regularly and make sure that the governing body holds you to account for the safety of everyone at the school. Pupils feel safe and talk knowledgeably about how to stay safe online and in the wider community.

Inspectors scrutinised the school's anti-bullying programme and records of actions taken when some pupils feel concerned about their welfare. You are diligent and scrupulous in tracking the effect of the measures you take to respond to pupils' concerns. You are developing further plans to keep pupils informed more closely whenever you investigate concerns they bring to your attention.

Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work that the inspection would focus on.

- The first area we considered was the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In 2016, pupils overall made good progress in their GCSEs, especially in English, mathematics and the English Baccalaureate measure in science. Most-able pupils made especially good progress in mathematics. Middle-ability pupils made particularly strong progress in English, mathematics and science and in the English Baccalaureate. However, some disadvantaged pupils made less good progress in their GCSEs. You have analysed this carefully and made improvements in how disadvantaged pupils are challenged and supported. You have trained staff to track the progress of all pupils more effectively.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now supported well through careful planning by teachers, especially in English, mathematics and science. You have involved parents much more this year in helping their children to succeed. For example, you have an online portal on your website that helps parents engage more quickly with what is being taught in school. Pupils value this and spoke to inspectors about how it helps communication with home. You offer after-school sessions in English and mathematics and those attending tell you how much this helps their classroom work. One-to-one tuition is offered to those pupils who need it the most this year. You have invited motivational speakers into assemblies. Now, in books and your performance information, we could see that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is good in key stages 3 and 4. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is less strong in some subjects in the open element, specifically, art, music and drama. You have identified that challenge, secure planning and tracking need to be improved in these subjects.
- The next aspect we considered was the relatively low attendance, in 2016, for some disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attendance for most pupils has been rising overall, consistently over the last three years. It is higher than the national average for secondary schools.

Crucial to the improvements seen this year has been the additional staffing you have secured. More teachers teach English and mathematics. More staff have been deployed to help with attendance. So, the work pupils do is better matched to their ability, and more pupils find attending school engages their interest and motivates them.

- You have directed senior staff and welfare support staff to focus even more rigorously on this issue. You are communicating with home, supporting families and working with the local authority. You are celebrating attendance more often. Your staff are working more effectively with the education welfare officer. This is reducing the level of persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils who have attendance below 90% are improving on a weekly basis.
- Learners' progress in the sixth form was a third area we examined. In 2016 you were disappointed with the progress made by students who took A levels. For the previous two years, progress had been nationally average. In 2016 progress made by students following AS courses was better, in line with national averages.
- You have a new leader for the post-16 programmes of study. You have rapidly improved the expectations and ambition for students. You have changed the way you set targets for students, so these are now more robust and rigorous. You have improved the way students are monitored and offering support in a timelier manner. You have helped students to get increasingly involved in the life of the school through their leadership of the house system, so, for example, they give support to younger pupils in their learning. You ensure that students get high-quality advice from their tutors and independent advice from careers advisors. As a result, inspectors could see improvements in progress made by students in their workbooks and in your tracking information. Progress is now good for A level students, AS students and those following vocational studies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they secure improvements in the persistent absence of some disadvantaged pupils and some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- disadvantaged pupils make at least good progress in subjects in the open element of the GCSE.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors visited 15 lessons and looked at pupils' workbooks on each occasion. Inspectors had meetings with leaders on safeguarding. They scrutinised your single central record and a wide range of other safeguarding documentation including recruitment records and impact records of actions you take to keep pupils safe. Inspectors scrutinised a range of information you keep to track pupils' progress, including your self-evaluation and development plans, policies and nationally published information about outcomes. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the leadership team, the chair of the governing body, as well as pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the 58 Parent View responses and free text responses.