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Katharine Tinsley
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Dear Katharine Tinsley

Short inspection of The St Leonards Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2017 with Sue Wood, 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 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. You all have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You are not complacent. Consequently, leaders and the local governing body are tackling weaknesses and regularly reviewing the impact of their actions. As a team, you challenge subject leaders to improve pupils' outcomes. You keep pupils safe. You are highly ambitious for every pupil and want each pupil to succeed. You have been supported effectively by the Hastings Academy Trust. Trustees have helped leaders learn from other schools and draw on the educational expertise of the members. As a result, leaders know how they can further improve teaching and learning, as well as the school's processes and policies to support pupils.

Leaders have established a culture and ethos which uses the school's motto 'Pride through Success', to raise aspirations and strive for excellence. Leaders also rightly encourage pupils to be respectful of and tolerant to all in the school and wider community. These actions have created strong, positive, working relationships between staff and pupils. Parents, pupils and staff refer to the school's strong sense of community. Pupils told us they feel very well supported by their teachers. Most parents would recommend this school to other parents.

Effective leadership of teaching means that the vast majority of pupils make good progress. Some pupils exceed age-related expectations. You showed me clear

evidence that many pupils join the school at levels below those expected for their age. We agreed that the majority achieve well and attain results that compare favourably with pupils with similar starting points. From low starting points, some pupils do exceptionally well. However, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, do not do as well as they should in some subjects.

In addition to the academic curriculum, most pupils take part in the school's 'Expert Learner' programme. This programme helps pupils take an active role within their community and encourages them to participate in extra-curricular opportunities. Parents and pupils commented on how this programme enriches pupils' school experiences.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified that more pupils could make outstanding progress if: pupils' literacy across all subjects improved; teachers used the good achievement information available to plan activities to match pupils' needs and abilities; and pupils' attendance and punctuality improved.

You have implemented a whole school literacy policy, making it a key focus in all subjects. Pupils understand key words and their meaning, technical vocabulary and learn how to write effectively in a range of different contexts. Leaders have also created a comprehensive programme of intervention to support pupils who need extra support with their literacy. This action is improving pupils' writing and reading across subjects.

Teachers know their pupils' individual needs. Where teaching is strongest, teachers apply the school's teaching and learning policy well. Teachers use assessment information effectively to plan and challenge pupils.

Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection. However, you have rightly judged that it needs to improve further, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You are also working closely with pupils and their families to improve punctuality to school and to lessons. As a result, punctuality is improving.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All necessary checks are undertaken in the recruitment of staff and new staff are provided with safeguarding training. Staff receive regular updates throughout the year and always at the start of the academic year. All staff have read the most up-to-date guidance on 'Keeping children safe in education'. There are clear systems that staff follow in reporting any concerns. Governors regularly check school processes and systems for safeguarding. Leaders responsible for children looked after carry out their duties meticulously.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and they feel safe in school. Parents agree their children are well cared for and are safe at the school. There is a strong safeguarding culture.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors looked closely at safeguarding arrangements. You correctly identified that the attendance of the disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities needs to improve further. This year, leaders have extended a whole school programme to improve the attendance of vulnerable pupils. This strategy builds on the attendance intervention programme for Year 11 disadvantaged pupils in 2016, which had a positive impact on pupils' attendance. For example, leaders were able to show how the use of a school minibus to collect some pupils in the morning, improved attendance and reduced their rates of persistent absence.
- You have identified that some pupils make more progress in some subjects than others. As a result, leaders have adapted the curriculum for key stage 3. Leaders now require teachers to focus on developing pupils' skills, such as reasoning and creative thinking, to master individual subjects. This is helping pupils secure their knowledge and understanding before they move onto key stage 4.
- You have identified accurately where improvements need to be made to ensure that more pupils make progress in modern foreign languages, mathematics and science. This is particularly relevant for specific ability groups, or disadvantaged pupils. As a result, you've strengthened the leadership of these subjects. Subject leaders now share good ideas, techniques and resources across subjects. In stronger subjects like English, pupils have been taught to stretch and challenge themselves because their teachers have very high expectations of what they can achieve. English teachers use the school system of 'medals and missions' consistently to praise and identify areas for improvement. This is helping pupils to make strong progress. However, there is still some variation in the quality of teaching in some subjects and between subjects.
- Leaders responsible for disadvantaged pupils have correctly identified these pupils' barriers to learning. Leaders responsible for teaching and learning have put in place strategies to focus teachers' attention on this group of pupils, including setting challenging aspirational targets. Leaders track and monitor the progress of all pupils, especially those disadvantaged. They check which groups still need further support to increase their rates of progress. Leaders ensure that a wide range of interventions are available to assist these pupils' learning. Teachers are increasingly adept at targeting groups of pupils to improve outcomes. This is already proving to be successful with middle-ability disadvantaged and lower-ability disadvantaged pupils. However, leaders recognise this is having less impact on the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance improves for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

- disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of Hastings Academy Trust, 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, middle leaders, members of the local governing body and Hastings Academy Trust. 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. We carried out learning walks with you and the leadership team to a variety of subjects and year groups. We looked at the academy's documentation, including your self-evaluation, priorities for the future, progress information of current pupils, governors' minutes, attendance and punctuality information for current pupils. We also checked the academy policies relating to safeguarding, behaviour, literacy, the curriculum and pupil premium. Inspectors considered 203 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 54 individual parent comments and 54 responses to the staff questionnaire.