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10 March 2016

Mr Tim Body
Principal
Westfield Academy
Tolpits Lane
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Dear Mr Body

Short inspection of Westfield Academy

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016 with Sally Nutman, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in 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 have a very clear understanding of the quality of education in the school. Your monitoring systems are well organised and provide you with good-quality information about how well pupils are learning.
- The school has improved in many areas since the predecessor school was last inspected. The quality of teaching has improved and the curriculum in Key Stages 4 and 5 is better suited to the needs of pupils. Subject leaders have a clearer understanding of the quality of teaching in their areas because they spend time monitoring pupils' progress.
- Pupils make good progress. They join the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are consistently below the national average. When they reach the end of Year 11, their standards are in line with the national average in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The attainment of learners in the sixth form is improving. This is particularly the case in academic subjects. In the past, outcomes in vocational courses have been much more successful than those at A and AS level. The picture is changing. School leaders have focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching and assessment in A and AS level courses is of a high quality. More students are now on track to gain the higher grades in these courses. Outcomes for vocational courses continue to be very good.

- Teaching is good. Pupils' work over time shows that many teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive, especially where teachers are very clear about what they want pupils to learn and how they expect them to behave. Teachers are increasingly thinking about how they can maximise the learning that happens in their lessons, and are openly debating with colleagues the strategies that are most effective.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work showed clear progress over time in many subjects. Pupils are, for example, gaining important skills of analysis in their history work in Year 10. Similarly, pupils are developing a wide range of techniques in art and design, and are applying these well to produce some very high-quality work.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. You have raised the school's expectations of pupils' behaviour and the overwhelming majority have responded positively. The proportion that do not comply with the code of conduct is diminishing and pupils say that disruption to their lessons is uncommon.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are predominantly positive. They enjoy most of their lessons. Pupils told inspectors that they especially enjoyed those lessons where, 'the teachers explain things really clearly and make the subject interesting'.
- Levels of attendance have improved considerably. In recent years, rates of absence were much higher than the national average. The school has focused on improving this and has been very successful in reducing absence so that the levels of attendance are now in line with national figures for secondary schools.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is not as well developed as in the rest of the school. The programmes of study of the national curriculum have not yet been matched to ensure a smooth transition from Key Stage 2. Equally, transition into Key Stage 4 (which begins in Year 9 in the school) is not sufficiently linked to the work pupils do in Years 7 and 8.
- Governance is of a very high quality. Governors have a very clear understanding of their role and are rigorous in holding school leaders to account for the impact of their work. The complex arrangements surrounding the building of a replacement school have been very well managed. Governors have also overseen a period of financial turbulence very effectively. The school finances, which were previously in deficit, are now in a much healthier state.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Leaders ensure that systems and procedures are in place. All mandatory training has taken place and employment records are well organised.
- Pupils who are vulnerable or most at risk are well known by a staff team that are committed to their well-being. These pupils receive appropriate guidance and support.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good progress from starting points that are well below the national average when they join the school. The proportion of pupils who achieved 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE level in 2015 was in line with the national average. This is in conflict with the published data because the school's entry policy for English examinations resulted in a large proportion of pupils' data not being taken into account. Pupils' outcomes in English were in line with the national figures, and were well above them in English literature. This positive picture is being sustained, with current pupils in Years 10 and 11 on track to do increasingly well in this subject.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics in 2015 was very good. A greater proportion of pupils made or exceeded the expected levels of progress than nationally. This is set to continue in 2016, with more pupils on track to gain the higher grades of A and A* than has been the case in the past.
- Pupils join the sixth form with levels of attainment that are broadly in line with national levels for their age. The range of courses that are on offer has expanded since the previous inspection; more 'academic' courses (GCE A and AS level) are on offer now, in addition to a range of vocational BTEC courses and Level 3 subsidiary diplomas. Outcomes for learners following the vocational route are very positive, with almost all learners gaining a distinction or distinction plus award in many courses. Outcomes for the academic courses are catching up, as the proportion of students on track to gain the higher grades is increasing in several courses.
- Where outcomes of courses in the sixth form have not been good enough, leaders have acted quickly to either change the course structure, remove the course from the choices available or improve the quality of teaching. This has led to improvements in subjects which have previously underperformed.
- Pupils make quicker progress in Key Stage 4 than they do in Key Stage 3. This is because the curriculum in Key Stage 3 does not take full account of the work that pupils have done in primary schools. Leaders have identified this as a key area for future improvement. Evidence in pupils' books shows that expectations of what pupils can achieve in Key Stage 3 are not as consistently high as they are in Years 9, 10 and 11.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability do well at Westfield Academy. The support and interventions that they access are well planned and closely match their needs. Leadership in this area is strong.
- Disadvantaged pupils are closely tracked throughout the school. Interventions are monitored and attainment gaps between this group and other pupils are smaller than the national average. Given this, the gaps have not yet narrowed enough and leaders are focused on making better use of additional funding to make more of a difference.
- The school's strategies to promote British values permeate much of what it does. A revised code of conduct makes clear the expectations for tolerance and respect. The student council are democratically elected and have made contributions to areas such as school lunches, the behaviour code and the design of the new building.

- Many pupils spoke of the improvements in behaviour in recent years. They largely attributed this change to the revised code of conduct, and the rigour with which this has been implemented. Some find the expectations too high, but concede that their lessons are much less likely to be disrupted than in the past, and that when they are, teachers intervene swiftly. The levels of exclusion have also fallen considerably since the previous inspection. While the revised code of conduct resulted in a 'spike' of exclusions for the small number of pupils who were reluctant to conform to the new rules, the overall level of exclusion has declined and continues to do so.
- The number of parents who responded to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) was 41 by the end of the inspection. The great majority of responses were positive but one quarter of parents would not recommend the school to another parent. Many parents wrote comments praising the school and its leaders, while only a very small number were unhappy. In contrast, when the school recently issued the same questionnaire at a parents' evening they received a much greater number of responses. Analysis of their responses shows that a much larger proportion of parents would recommend the school.
- A key strength of the leadership and management of the school is its governance. Governors provide a clarity of purpose and direction for school leaders, and do not shrink from ensuring that leaders are accountable. Governors regularly receive and scrutinise reports from senior and subject leaders. They explore improvement strategies and are ambitious for the school's future. Governors have invested a huge amount of time and effort into ensuring that the new school building is as good an environment for learning as it can be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Transition between key stages is more effective by:
 - working with feeder primary schools to create a Key Stage 3 curriculum that provides continuity and progression for pupils
 - developing consistent assessment systems that monitor pupils' progress from Year 7 to Year 11.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, four governors, and pupils to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. The school's self-evaluation documentation was evaluated and discussed. Inspectors visited lessons, observed teaching and looked at pupils' work in several subjects. Some of these visits to lessons were with senior leaders. The school's improvement plans, its safeguarding records, attendance and exclusion data and assessment information were also evaluated by inspectors.