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Mr Adam Palmer
Principal
Dyke House Sports and Technology College
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Dear Mr Palmer

Short inspection of Dyke House Sports and Technology College

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019 with Shelley Heseltine, Ofsted Inspection, and Malcolm Kirtley, Her Majesty's 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 October 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You, the executive principal and other leaders provide a clear message to all members of the school community that your 'decision making is driven entirely by what is best for children'. You are committed to ensuring that pupils get a good education and as your trust statement says, you are 'outcomes focused and child-centred'. Leaders, including governors, are clear about the school's current strengths and priorities for further improvement. Collectively, you are committed to raising standards across the school. As a result, plans are clearly focused on improving pupils' progress by ensuring that teaching is consistently effective. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that pupils' education is consistently at the standard that you expect.

There have been some recent improvements in the quality of teaching. However, inspection evidence suggests that it remains variable across a range of subjects, including English and science. Pupils typically attain in line with national averages by the end of Year 11. Leaders' actions to address pupils' progress can be seen in mathematics. As a result, pupils' progress is stronger in this subject. Despite this, pupils do not achieve as well as they should across key stage 4, especially in English and science.

The previous inspection report called for leaders to eradicate all gaps in the

performance and attendance of different groups of pupils in the school, especially the disadvantaged. Overall, attendance rates have improved slightly, but remain well below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has reduced, although it still remains well above the national average. Leaders have reorganised the approach to attendance. New staff have been appointed to focus on this issue and attendance incentives for pupils have been introduced. Despite this, the proportion of pupils, in particular disadvantaged pupils, who are regularly absent from school remains well above the national average.

In 2018, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils completing their Year 11 studies were well below those achieved by other pupils nationally. The difference in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school is starting to reduce. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not achieve as well as their classmates or other pupils nationally.

Learning routines are well established and the vast majority of pupils are engaged in their learning. Pupils spoke positively about the changes that you have made to behaviour and believe that the high staff presence around the school has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Your records and inspection evidence support this view.

In September 2018, you introduced a new system for recognising pupils' contributions in the classroom. This additional recognition for effort or achievement through applause, and what you call 'extra applause', has had a positive impact on levels of pupil engagement. Behaviour is improving and the number of pupils who are excluded from school has reduced considerably. However, the proportion of pupils excluded from school remains above the national average for secondary schools.

The clear majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were happy to recommend the school to other parents. However, over half of those who shared their views through the free-text facility, expressed concern over communication and what they consider to be the excessive use of sanctions, including fixed-term exclusions. Despite this, the vast majority confirm that their children are happy, safe and well looked after at the school.

In January 2018, the academy council merged with that of another trust school and now provides challenge and support to the leaders of both schools. Governors are clear in their role and use training and guidance from the trust to improve their effectiveness. They have strong links with the school and local community. Governors consider that, as the chair of the academy council told me, they now 'have much more rigorous monitoring systems'. Consequently, they are now more readily able to offer higher levels of challenge to school leaders, because the quality of information that they receive has improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority in the school. Leaders have created a culture of safeguarding and have ensured that procedures to make sure pupils are safe are fit for purpose. You have developed a strong culture of safeguarding through what the trust calls 'deep support'. This approach enables you to adopt a holistic approach to the care of all pupils, especially the most vulnerable.

Leaders, including the designated safeguarding leader, have a clear understanding of the challenges facing your most vulnerable pupils. You have ensured that the comprehensive training of staff and governors is updated regularly. As a result, they have a clear understanding of the potential risks posed to your pupils and the steps they should take to protect pupils from harm.

All staff understand their obligations regarding the most recent government guidance. Consequently, concerns are reported in a timely manner and pupils access appropriate care and support quickly.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding documentation and child protection records are thorough and meticulously kept. They work effectively with a range of external agencies to care for pupils who may be at risk of harm. However, they are not afraid to challenge agencies to make sure that pupils get the support they need.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and those pupils who spoke with inspectors were unanimous in their view that they feel safe in school. They have an in-depth understanding of the risks of working online or when using social media. Despite the concerns of a small number of parents, pupils say that although bullying can and does take place, they are equally clear that it is rare. They are confident that staff will respond quickly to any reported incidents. Pupils were equally clear in their view that behaviour in the school has improved, and continues to improve.

Inspection findings

- Progress in English over time has been well below the national average overall. Boys and disadvantaged pupils' progress has been very weak. With the support of the executive principal, you have revised the approach to the teaching of English and introduced new practices. Subject specialist support from the trust, new standardised assessments and targeted feedback on individual questions have been put in place. Pupils also benefit from two weekly intervention sessions aimed at improving certain skills, such as the use of quotations. However, despite recent improvements, boys do not consistently make the progress of which they are capable in this key subject. Boys' work shows that their progress is weaker than that of the girls in the school. Overall boys' written accuracy and their ability to structure written arguments is less developed.
- Inspectors found that improvements in the teaching of mathematics are already having a positive impact on the progress pupils make. Work in pupils' mathematics books showed that pupils were making good progress. They have access to challenge through highly complex mathematical content. The impact of the school's very recently introduced approach to feedback on tackling pupils'

misconceptions was also clear. As a result, pupils are making stronger progress in mathematics.

- In recent years, pupils' progress in science has been weak. In some cases, this has been accentuated by significant staffing changes. Pupils' science books show inconsistencies between the progress of boys and girls. Boys' books have frequent examples of incomplete work, which hinders their progress. There is also some evidence of appropriately challenging work, but this is inconsistent. Since the last inspection, the progress that pupils made in science has been weak. As a result, pupils have underachieved in this key subject. While the school's progress information shows clear signs of improvement, progress in science remains weak due to a lack of consistency in teaching, learning and assessment.
- You and other staff know the pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. You have recently appointed a new inclusion manager and since September 2018 new procedures have been introduced to ensure that parents are fully informed of, and involved in, any pupil reviews. The combination of what you call 'deep support' and 'deep learning' results in an effective understanding and support of the pastoral needs of these pupils. Support for pupils with SEND is a strength of the school. Consequently, pupils with SEND attend school regularly and make good progress.
- Leaders are ambitious for the small number of students in the sixth form. Students are confident about looking after their own welfare and appreciate that they are respected and treated more like adults. They are well prepared for adulthood. Students who met with inspectors were generally positive about their sixth-form experience and the help they receive. The sixth form provides a good standard of education. Consequently, most students attain outcomes that enable them to move on to suitable next steps in education and employment, including to Russell Group universities.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attainment and progress carefully. The 'STEP' approach, 'Student Tracking of Effort and Progress', provides you with a detailed overview of the progress of each pupil in the school. You are, therefore, able to readily identify where standards need to rise quickly. Leaders use weekly inclusion meetings to discuss pupils' progress and determine the interventions required. Working with the executive principal and other leaders across the trust, this system has been refined and you are, therefore, confident in the accuracy of your internal data. As a result, underachievement is being addressed by more focused actions. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these new strategies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of all pupils, and those pupils who are regularly absent from school, improves further so that they make better progress, particularly among disadvantaged pupils

- they continue to work to improve pupils' behaviour and so reduce the number of incidents that lead to fixed-term exclusions
- they further reduce differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged classmates
- they improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English so that boys become more accomplished and accurate in their writing
- the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment in science improves.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hartlepool Borough. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Murray
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the executive principal. I spoke with the chief executive officer of the trust by telephone. I also met with the chair of the governing body. My colleagues met with other leaders, including those responsible for the behaviour and attendance of pupils and for disadvantaged pupils. Together with leaders, inspectors visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning and to look at pupils' work. Inspectors, together with leaders, also looked in depth at English, mathematics and science books. My colleagues met with a group of pupils from key stage 3 and key stage 4. One inspector listened to four pupils read. Inspectors also listened informally to pupils read during their visits to lessons.

Consideration was given to the 58 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire or to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and a sample of monitoring records. My colleague also met with your designated safeguarding leader and reviewed documentation and records about how you keep your pupils safe.