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Mr Nick Wergan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wergan

Short inspection of Steyning Grammar School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017 with Jenny Jones and Gerard Strong, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher, you provide clear leadership and vision and are well respected by staff, pupils and sixth formers. You have secured very productive working relationships with staff, governors and parents and offer first-class leadership. Together with senior leaders, you have introduced a range of new systems and overseen improvements since the previous inspection. Parents, pupils and sixth formers are rightly proud of Steyning Grammar School and all that it achieves.

Since your appointment three years ago, together with governors you have addressed areas of underperformance. You have made new appointments to the senior leadership team with the clear aim of raising standards of teaching, learning and assessment. The school vision, 'Every person the best they can be' is widely shared by pupils and staff and creates an aspirational culture. Steyning Grammar School is rapidly improving because of the inspirational leadership that you and your team provide. Parents, governors and the local authority praise your leadership, as one parent explained:

'My child has had an excellent journey through the school. The headteacher and his team are passionate about learning and a learning culture underpinned by the school's character education enables students to flourish.'

During your last inspection, the inspectors recognised the many strengths of your school including: senior leaders' high expectations; governors' contribution to leadership and the achievement of pupils and sixth formers. These continue to be key strengths of the school. Leadership of the sixth form is particularly strong. In 2013, inspectors identified a need to: improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment information in some subject areas; and focus on improving questioning and ensure that better use of time is made in lessons. Leaders and governors have responded well to these areas for improvement. Middle leaders now work well together to bring about improvements by sharing planning, resources and training opportunities across the school. In addition, senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and have provided teachers with appropriate resources and training that have ensured pupils make stronger progress in languages and humanities. You are aware that more needs to be done to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching still further, particularly in English and technology.

Leaders and governors are justly proud of the school's focus on opportunities to build character from Year 7 through to Year 13. This focus on the development of wider skills, coupled with the Christian ethos of the school and a clear promotion of equalities, ensures strong provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents recognise and value the well-rounded education that the school provides.

Governors are a dedicated team with a detailed understanding of the school and they bring a range of professional skills to support leadership. They are kept well informed through regular visits to the school and via leaders' accurate tracking and assessment information. They offer robust levels of challenge to areas such as achievement and recently have begun a closer scrutiny of the effectiveness of systems designed to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Your improvement planning identifies the correct priorities for further improvement and you have initiated a wide range of activities to achieve them. You have prioritised raising standards in English and are aware that there is more to be done to ensure greater consistency of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils. Recently, there have been improvements to overall attendance. However, disadvantaged pupils' attendance needs to rise further. More needs to be done to ensure that your self-evaluation is firmly rooted in evidence, enabling your action plans to prioritise the most effective actions needed to continue to improve attendance and outcomes for some groups of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and governors rightly place a high emphasis on pupils' safety and welfare. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose; there is a caring culture of vigilance and detailed record-keeping. Appropriate checks are made against all adults who work with pupils and accurate logs are maintained. Staff receive regular and relevant training on safeguarding, with appropriate focus on maintaining awareness of radicalisation and e-safety. Regular communication between key staff in school and other organisations ensures timely and effective support for pupils of

concern and reviews of the impact of any actions taken.

Staff, pupils and parents report that pupils feel safe and well looked after at Steyning Grammar School. While the school is large and on a split site, most pupils reported that staff know them well and they feel well cared for. Pupils told us they know who to go to should they have any concerns and trust adults to resolve any issues that may arise.

Inspection findings

- During this visit, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements the inspection team focused on specific aspects of the school's provision including:
 - the quality of teaching, particularly in English and modern foreign languages
 - how well disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress from their starting points
 - attendance and exclusion rates for key groups of pupils
 - how effectively the sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study pathways to ensure that all pupils, particularly the most able, make strong progress.
- Senior leaders have developed a culture of sharing good practice and professional development opportunities. Consequently, middle leaders and teachers have high expectations and make good use of their subject and assessment knowledge to design stimulating lessons. Typically, teachers focus clearly on pupils' intended learning and show a good awareness of the different groups of pupils, as well as individual pupil's starting points and the progress that they make over time. Very strong feedback in the staff survey evidences the high levels of staff morale. One member of staff spoke for many when they praised, 'the innovative and inspiring working environment' in the school.
- Inspectors witnessed how many teachers use questioning and discussion very effectively to probe and develop pupils' understanding. Where this happens, pupils' books show how they make good progress over time. In a small minority of lessons seen, including in some English lessons, the teacher's expectations were not as high and the pace of learning was slower. Where this happens, the most able pupils in particular are not being sufficiently challenged.
- Most teachers give helpful feedback and clear guidance to pupils which they use to improve their work. However, there is some variability in the effectiveness of the school's policy on the use of feedback within and between different subject areas. For example, more needs to be done to ensure that pupils know how to improve their work in modern foreign languages.
- Last year, leaders introduced new systems and resources to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, the differences between the progress made by this group and their peers are diminishing in nearly all year groups. More recently, the school has invested in new leadership and a range of strategies including extra lessons and a variety of resources to support disadvantaged pupils. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to evaluate the impact of these various new initiatives to prioritise those

that have the most impact upon improving the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

- Historically, overall attendance has been just below national figures. You have recently restructured the leadership and management of attendance and there are now clearer lines of accountability and increased capacity for challenging poor attendance. The school now works more closely with families and outside agencies and has been able to secure some improvements to attendance of key groups. Overall attendance is now in line with national figures and there are signs that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving. However, disadvantaged pupils still attend less regularly than others and their persistent absence figures remain too high. There is still further work to do to evaluate the impact of your new systems and ensure that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils matches that of their peers.
- Strong and effective leadership of the sixth form ensures that all requirements of the 16 to 19 study pathways are well met. High-quality teaching, coupled with regular internal and external moderation of assessments, ensures that standards have improved. This, together with a highly effective mentorship programme, has ensured that achievement is currently higher than it was in 2016. Sixth formers are entirely positive about provision and could not speak highly enough of their teachers, recognising the extra support and guidance that they give. Pastoral support is particularly strong, as one sixth former was keen to point out, 'Their focus is 100% on you.' Learners value the opportunity to play an active part in wider school life, willingly mentoring younger pupils and getting involved in a wide range of activities and charity fundraising events. There is a culture of high aspirations, coupled with quality careers advice. This ensures that all sixth formers, including the most able, are well prepared for their next steps to university or apprenticeships.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the overall attendance rates continue to be at least in line with national averages and they take action to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils still further
- consistently high-quality teaching meets the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able, in English and across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Jointly with yourself, or other senior leaders, we visited several classrooms on both school sites to look at teaching and learning. We looked at a range of pupils' work in their exercise books. We observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and around the school and held meetings with small groups of pupils and sixth formers. We took into account 211 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the contents of two letters received from parents. In addition, I also considered the views expressed through staff and pupil questionnaires. I evaluated a range of documents, including pupils' progress information and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.