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Mrs A Scully
Headteacher
Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School
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Dear Mrs Scully

Short inspection of Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

Following my visit to the school on 17 April 2018 with Paul Murphy and Scott Norman, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your appointment as headteacher in February 2018 followed a period of changes in leadership, and is now providing stability and continuity. You know your school well and have successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

Your determination to provide the best possible standard of education for each pupil is evident. You are well supported in this by the executive headteacher, your leadership team, your staff, and a very knowledgeable and effective governing body. You have accurately identified areas of recent underperformance, taking, and continuing to take, appropriate actions to maintain the existing high standards and bring about improvements.

You and your staff promote the school's core values in a positive manner. You set increasingly high levels of expectation and aspiration, to which pupils respond well. The learning environment is calm and well ordered. Pupils' behaviour is commendable. Parents are strongly positive in their views of the school. As one parent commented, 'The teachers have the best interests of the pupils at heart. There is an excellent support system in place to nurture and encourage the girls to achieve highly.'

You and your staff provide a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities for the pupils, which they value highly. These include, for example, sports, music, arts and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award activities. All of these enrich the culture of the school in a positive way.

Leaders have established support for mental health and well-being for the pupils, for which a number of staff are appropriately trained. In addition, leaders draw upon the expertise of external agencies to ensure that, where the need arises, the pupils are supported appropriately and effectively. Pupils and parents appreciate this provision.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted several strengths in the progress and attainment of pupils; the personal development, care and support of pupils; and their behaviour and achievement. Inspectors challenged school leaders to improve progress and attainment in the sixth form so that students would achieve the top grades in AS- and A-level qualifications. Furthermore, senior and middle leaders were targeted with addressing the underachievement of these students more energetically than had previously been the case.

Safeguarding is effective.

A positive culture of safeguarding runs throughout the school that makes sure that pupils are safe and secure. This is well supported by robust systems and procedures that meet statutory requirements and are fit for purpose. Pupils say that they feel very safe in the school, and this confidence is strongly supported by the views of parents.

Your designated safeguarding lead is well supported by several deputies. Procedures related to recruitment of staff are thorough because leaders and governors have been appropriately trained in safer recruitment. Training of staff is both comprehensive and regular. For example, staff that join the school mid-year receive suitable safeguarding training as part of their induction to the school. In addition, leaders provide regular training relating to any changes in safeguarding practices as required, including child protection. As a result, all staff know the signs to look out for that may indicate a pupil is at risk of harm, and know what action to take when necessary to support vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- During the meeting with you at the start of the day, we discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness, and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included:
 - the extent to which leaders have improved the rates of progress and levels of attainment in the sixth form
 - how successfully leaders have reduced levels of persistent absence
 - how effectively leaders have maintained standards and achievements and sustained improvements since the last inspection

- You and your leaders have taken effective action to address the improvements required within the sixth form that were identified at the last inspection. For example, your head of sixth form has established robust procedures that provide regular and accurate analysis of students' progress. This provides information on any areas of underachievement, allowing for the provision of timely support and intervention, as appropriate.
- You recognised that aspiration to achieve the highest grades in AS- and A-level qualifications had not been at the level you would want. As a result, you have taken effective action. Consequently, staff and students now increasingly strive to achieve at the highest levels. Indications are that the proportion of higher grades in the current year is greater than in previous years.
- The number of students successfully gaining a place in universities, including those gaining places at Oxbridge universities, remains above national averages.
- Attendance overall has been, and remains, strong, being consistently above the national average for several years. The level of persistent absence has been similarly strong, being below the national average. However, in 2017 the level of persistent absence rose to above that of the previous years. Leaders have worked effectively together to address this, in conjunction with external agencies, adopting a number of strategies to secure improvement. For example, leaders have recently appointed an attendance officer and improved communications with parents are now in place. As a result of these actions, the level of persistent absence has reduced since September 2017.
- Overall progress by the end of key stage 4 in 2017 was well above the national average. Progress of current pupils in key stages 3 and 4 is strong in the vast majority of subjects. Indications are that the overall progress of the current Year 11 pupils will at least match that of last year. The progress of the comparatively small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school is above the national average of other pupils with similar starting points.
- Teaching and outcomes in English are very strong, with pupils' progress placing it within the top 10% of schools nationally. Outcomes in a range of subjects, including mathematics and humanities, were similarly positive. You have identified that strategic development and leadership has not been at the standard expected in physical education, drama and physics. This is in part related to staffing issues, which you are currently addressing.
- You recognise that currently your school's website does not comply with the Department for Education's requirements on what maintained schools must publish online. In response, you have initiated immediate actions to address this to ensure that requirements are met.
- You acknowledge that the practice of a small proportion of middle leaders is not at the consistent level you expect. For example, the scrutiny of workbooks undertaken during the inspection identified that some teachers within a few subjects do not follow the school's agreed marking policy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- aspects of underperformance are addressed as rapidly as possible, by:
 - implementing planned changes in a timely manner
 - ensuring that these changes are consistently applied by all staff
- middle leaders are increasingly held to account to ensure consistency of practice and that the highest standards are met and maintained.

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

Yours sincerely

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas the inspectors would focus on during the inspection. During the day, inspectors held further discussions with you, the executive headteacher, your senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils.

Inspectors, accompanied by you and senior leaders, visited 16 lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders. Inspectors took account of 237 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered written comments from 230 parents. Inspectors also considered the 44 staff responses, and 184 responses from pupils to the online questionnaires. Inspectors visited an assembly, a tutor period and met with pupils in key stages 4 and 5. In addition, inspectors analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour information, minutes of governors' meetings, and safeguarding policies and procedures.