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4 June 2018

Mr Andrew Wellbeloved
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wellbeloved

Short inspection of Townsend Church of England School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Nicola Hood, 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 December 2015

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your senior colleagues have led the school with commitment, determination and a clear sense of moral purpose. The effectiveness of leadership at the school is recognised by a very large majority of pupils, staff and parents alike. The relatively small size of the school means that staff and pupils know each other well. One pupil likened the school to a 'very happy family'.

You have helped to shape a highly inclusive school, where there are high expectations of what all pupils can achieve, regardless of their background, race, religion or sexuality. You welcome pupils who have not found it easy to settle into other schools and who often do not join the school at the usual start of the school year. These pupils are fully integrated into the school community, and like almost all other pupils at the school, attend well and move successfully to the next stage of their education or employment.

School leaders have effectively prioritised the welfare and personal development of pupils. The school's underpinning principle of 'respect for all' permeates every area of school life, and informs the attitudes and actions of pupils and teachers. All pupils receive strong levels of support, guidance and care and they feel highly valued as a result. They are proud of their school and clearly enjoy it. They behave extremely well. They look after the school site as well as they look after each other. Sixth-form students set a very positive example and play a valuable role in supporting younger pupils.

Teaching continues to be effective in all key stages, including in the sixth form. Pupils work diligently and with enthusiasm. Classrooms are calm and industrious environments and pupils routinely work hard. Relationships within the classroom are almost universally constructive. Pupils ask and answer questions confidently and articulately. Outside of the classroom pupils involve themselves enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Over 40% of pupils in Year 10 are currently undertaking The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme programme. St Albans Music School is situated on the school site and this provides the chance for pupils to engage in an array of musical activities.

You and your senior colleagues have successfully addressed the recommendations outlined in the previous inspection report about how to strengthen teaching further. Teachers consistently follow the school's assessment policy when they provide feedback to pupils. They use questioning effectively to investigate and develop pupils' understanding. These developments are helping teaching, and therefore outcomes, in all subject areas improve towards the standards in the highest-performing departments.

You are committed to ensuring that pupils make strong progress consistently. School leaders are highly conscious that key stage 4 outcomes in 2017 were not as strong as they had been in previous years and they have been assiduous in evaluating the reasons for this. They have subsequently further sharpened and strengthened the strategies in place to ensure that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make equally rapid progress, whatever their starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have helped create a vigilant and transparent culture of safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are clear about the procedures they need to follow if they have the smallest concern, and all concerns are followed up methodically and in a timely fashion. The school maintains excellent relationships with external agencies. Leaders regularly evaluate all dimensions of safety and safeguarding so they can make continuous improvements.

Pupils say that they feel very safe at school, and this is supported by evidence from this inspection. The school ensures that pupils know about risks they may routinely face, including the use of the internet and social networking sites, through assemblies, tutorial periods and lessons throughout the school. Pupils are very confident that there are adults at school that they can talk to if they need advice and that the school will deal effectively with any concerns that are reported. A distinctive feature of the school is the pivotal role that pupils themselves play in creating and sustaining this ethos of safety. Pupils can become RAISE (respect, achieve, inspire, support, encourage) ambassadors, who are trained to talk to their peers about issues such as bullying. 'Pop-up peers' play a similar role in communicating positive messages about well-being and mental health. Sixth-form students play a key leadership role within these strategies.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, pupils made overall progress which was significantly above that made by pupils nationally. However, in 2017 overall progress was considerably less strong. This was because pupils who joined the school with attainment that was below or above the national average did not make the same rapid progress as those who joined the school with average attainment. My first line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school has addressed the issues which had caused this.
- The number of low prior-attaining pupils in the 2017 cohort was very small and some pupils within this group achieved very well. The school's assessment information about similar pupils currently in the school shows that a large majority of them are making even stronger progress. Evidence from this inspection, including visits to lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' work, supports this contention because it shows that teachers are planning effectively to meet their individual needs. Strategies which have been put in place to help pupils who need to catch up when they first join the school have also been strengthened considerably.
- The school has restructured and strengthened its provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Learning support assistants work effectively with specific pupils, but also work more widely with all those who need support in a class. School leaders have broadened the key stage 4 curriculum so there is now a more balanced range of appropriate courses for pupils with below-average attainment. However, the school does not communicate sufficient detail about its key stage 4 courses to parents through the school website.
- Teachers are also clear about who the pupils with high prior attainment in their classes are. They have all received specific training on how to stretch the most able pupils in their classes, and this 'thinking hard' initiative has led to a large range of strategies to challenge them being implemented in lessons. The school's assessment information shows that these strategies are together having a positive impact on the progress made by the most able pupils in the school; however, school leaders have not evaluated sufficiently which are making the biggest relative impact on standards.
- My next line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school is improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This is because in 2017 disadvantaged pupils did not do well enough as they did not make strong progress.
- School leaders were able to explain a wide range of strategies which have been implemented to improve the rate of progress for disadvantaged pupils across all year groups. The school collates and disseminates personalised information about each disadvantaged pupil to help teachers plan to overcome each pupil's individual barriers to learning. The school has effectively improved communication with the parents of disadvantaged pupils. The school makes sure that pupil premium funding is used to allow pupils to access revision materials and places on school trips and activities which will enhance their motivation and engagement.
- Teachers prioritise the needs of disadvantaged pupils when they plan lessons. The standard of presentation in pupils' written work is very high; teachers make

sure that disadvantaged pupils maintain coherent, ordered written records which will support future revision. Extra teaching is provided for disadvantaged pupils who need to catch up outside of normal lessons. The school is successfully improving the literacy of disadvantaged pupils through a focus on reading; there was less evidence of strategies for ensuring that disadvantaged pupils mastered important subject-specific vocabulary. Evidence gathered during this inspection supports the school's own performance information, which suggests that disadvantaged pupils are now catching up in Year 11 and that progress is further accelerating lower down the school.

- My final line of enquiry was to investigate how successfully the school is working to eliminate the inconsistencies in outcomes between different subject departments. In 2017, pupils made steady progress at key stage 4 in science and mathematics and pupils made even stronger progress in other subjects, such as history and religious education. However, in other subjects such as English, French and geography, progress was weaker.
- School leaders were able to explain convincingly a range of strategies which have been put in place to promote consistently positive outcomes across all subjects. Systems of quality assurance have been strengthened, and individual performance management targets are closely aligned to the needs of departmental development plans. The school's programme of training is designed to support teachers in meeting these targets.
- Increasingly teachers are able to share effective practice across subject departments; every teacher has an identified 'sharing buddy' from another department for mutual support and the exchange of ideas. The school's own performance information suggests that most previously underperforming subjects are now catching up across all key stages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to strengthen provision for disadvantaged pupils so that they catch up with other pupils' attainment nationally
- they further sharpen strategies used to teach the most able pupils, particularly by routinely evaluating the strategies that are in place
- they enhance the level of detail they communicate to parents and carers through the school website about key stage 4 courses.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, teachers, governors and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons, and all of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's leadership team.

We scrutinised a range of school documentation including: policies; the school's self-evaluation; the school's improvement plan; safeguarding records; and information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance.

We considered the views expressed in 133 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 125 free-text responses, together with 49 questionnaires returned by school staff.