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Dear Ms Herman

Short inspection of Shenfield High School

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2018 with Sue Smith and Ruth Brock, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and senior leaders have identified accurately the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You reflect carefully on the needs of the school community and articulate a clear vision for the school's future that is driven by a strong sense of moral purpose and commitment. This is shared by other leaders, including governors, and together you have successfully overseen significant changes since the previous inspection. For example, since September 2016, the school has admitted a small proportion of pupils each year who demonstrate a talent for sport or the performing arts. The school is now oversubscribed because the local community has great faith in the quality of education provided. Typical comments expressed by the many parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were: 'I could not recommend this school more highly because they are incredible,' and, 'Shenfield High School is an inclusive school that encourages diversity in thinking and learning.'

Since the previous inspection, the sixth form has grown in size, and these students achieve well. Many of your sixth formers go on to study a wide range of subjects at university.

Pupils and students enjoy learning and are proud to be part of Shenfield High School. They move calmly and confidently around the school and demonstrate exemplary conduct and attitudes to learning in most lessons. They build positive relationships with each other and with their teachers.

The school offers a broad and well-considered range of subjects in all years. Your staff ensure that pupils and students receive the right information and guidance when moving on to the next stage in their education, training or employment. You are successful in your aim to enrich pupils' learning experiences through a wide range of extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils in the sports and performing arts academies spoke enthusiastically about how they have benefited from the rich provision in these subjects.

When planning improvements to the school's work, your staff appreciate the consideration you and other leaders also give to their needs and well-being. 'I feel policies are shared and developed with staff to ensure they can be designed in a way to minimise additional workload or even reduce it,' was typical of the comments made. Every member of staff that responded to Ofsted's online staff survey said that they are proud to work at the school.

You have taken decisive action to strengthen teaching since the previous inspection. Teaching is typically stimulating, and teachers make good use of a wide range of resources to engage pupils and help them learn more effectively. As a result, pupils are keen and able to explain what they are learning. Leaders provide teachers with well-tailored training to enhance their teaching skills. Alongside this, you encourage teachers to research and develop new teaching and learning strategies with their colleagues.

In 2017, pupils' progress across all subjects at GCSE was just above the national average. Although this progress appears to have stalled slightly in 2018, the school's assessment information indicates that most groups of pupils continue to achieve well. You are now focusing on improving the progress made by pupils who are disadvantaged, the most able pupils and boys. You have also identified that the increased level of challenge in GCSE science courses led to a decline in attainment in 2018. You and your leaders already have secure plans in place to address this.

The experienced and effective governing body has played a central role in securing the continued improvement of the school. Governors are passionate in their mission to make the school the best it can be. They understand and fulfil their statutory responsibilities well. They provide you and other senior leaders with appropriate levels of challenge and support. Governors systematically scrutinise the school's performance and consult well with pupils, staff and parents and carers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strong aspect of the school and safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have designed the pastoral support system well so that, 'Every child is known and known well.' Nobody lets anything go.

All staff have received up-to-date documentation and training. The designated safeguarding leaders, and the team that support them, demonstrate exemplary practice in their record keeping. They conduct a meticulous analysis of the needs of the most vulnerable pupils and are tenacious in ensuring that they are kept safe.

Governors take a principled and highly effective lead in ensuring that the school meets its statutory safeguarding responsibilities and that pupils' well-being is the highest priority. You provide sensitive support to those pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern or who are school refusers. The Oasis Centre provides these pupils with support to reintegrate themselves into school life. Discussions with some of these pupils highlighted how effective this provision has been.

The school adapts well to dealing with new concerns as they arise, for example an increased incidence of mental health concerns among some younger pupils.

Inspection findings

- At our initial meeting, we agreed the lines of enquiry to explore to determine whether the school remains good. First, inspectors considered how effectively leaders and teachers ensure that all pupils and students, particularly those who are disadvantaged, and the most able, make good progress. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 4 in 2017 was well below the national average. GCSE outcomes in 2017 indicated that the most able pupils made less progress than their peers in school in English and modern foreign languages. Recent assessment information also indicates that the most able pupils' attainment in science is still below the national average.
- Leaders and teachers identify any barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils experience and provide them with suitably tailored support. You and your staff work effectively to engage with the parents of these pupils, and particularly those who are hardest to reach. Strategies such as The 100 Club successfully ensure that most pupils who have low levels of attainment in English and mathematics when they enter the school move swiftly to the required standard. As a result of your actions, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at GCSE in 2018 improved, indicating that your chosen approaches are effective.
- You have put in place a series of intervention programmes for Year 11 pupils designed to improve outcomes for the most able pupils. Your school self-evaluation indicates that these plans are having a positive effect. However, governors know that provision for this group of pupils and students is still a work in progress.
- At A level in 2017, the progress of those students with the highest levels of prior attainment at GCSE was significantly below the national figure. The school's analysis indicated a small decrease in attainment at the highest levels in the 2018 A-level results. Leaders understand the reasons for this and have implemented suitable plans to address the matter. For example, your science teachers share good practice with staff from a local school where students perform well in the sciences at A level.

- Another line of enquiry focused on the steps leaders are taking to improve provision in modern foreign languages. This is because the number of pupils studying a modern foreign language at GCSE has fallen steadily since the previous inspection. The progress pupils have made has also fallen well below the national average.
- You and other leaders have set out a strategy to raise levels of participation and improve outcomes in languages. All pupils are able to study a language at GCSE. You have appointed a new head of department and established greater staffing stability in the languages department. In 2018, pupils' attainment in Spanish and German improved at GCSE compared with 2017. This is because the quality of teaching has improved. It is now more engaging and better planned, so that pupils have a clearer understanding of the key grammatical concepts. Nevertheless, you and your leaders know that there is not a 'quick fix' to this area for development and that recent improvements are not firmly in place.
- Inspectors also explored whether you and your leaders have successfully addressed the recommendations to improve teaching and behaviour made at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers now assess pupils' progress more effectively in class. You and other leaders recently chose to introduce a 'live mark book' system that provides parents with immediate feedback on their children's progress. In terms of literacy, middle leaders in English, mathematics and science are working together to make the curriculum more accessible and understandable to pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. In their responses to Ofsted's online surveys, pupils, parents and staff all agreed that pupils behave well and that teachers manage behaviour effectively. This is supported by the fact that exclusion rates have fallen and are well below national averages. The number of referrals to the school's internal isolation room has decreased significantly.
- Finally, inspectors investigated the curriculum innovations that you have introduced over the last two years. Under your strategic direction, teachers have redesigned what pupils learn at key stage 3 and how they are assessed. They have studied the primary school curriculum to ensure that no time is wasted when pupils join the school in Year 7. Early indications suggest that this is providing pupils with a more secure understanding of the knowledge and skills in each subject before moving on to GCSE.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils make progress that is at least in line with that made by similar pupils nationally
- the actions taken to strengthen provision in modern foreign languages are well embedded and lead to more pupils and students studying and achieving well in these subjects at GCSE and A level.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Whear
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your senior and middle leaders to discuss progress since the previous inspection. Inspectors also met with two members of the governing body and two groups of pupils to gain their views of the school.

Inspectors scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's self-evaluation document. Inspectors examined the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspectors undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. Inspectors focused particularly on English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages.

Inspectors took account of the views of 80 staff and 63 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online surveys. Inspectors also considered the 225 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.