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Mrs Helen Phillips
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Dear Mrs Phillips

Short inspection of Bedford High School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Claire Hollister, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, ably supported by your well-established senior leadership team and skilled governors, have put in place effective strategies to maintain strengths and improve areas of weakness. The school's self-evaluation is honest, accurate and based on thorough analysis of a range of information.

Your staff are very loyal to you and to the school. They are committed to ensuring that pupils reach their full potential. They said that you make them feel valued and give them opportunities to develop professionally. One comment typified the views of staff: 'Now, more than ever, I feel valued, listened to and supported in my career.'

Governors bring high levels of skill, experience and loyalty. They show their commitment in the considerable time they give, not only to attending meetings, but also to visiting the school regularly to see the impact of their policies on pupils' experiences. They use their expertise in safeguarding and pastoral matters very well to support staff in meeting pupils' needs. The minutes of meetings show clearly that they have up-to-date and detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use this well to ask you forthright and challenging questions. Governors have played an important role in securing improvements in pupils' progress.

You work effectively with business partners and careers officers to raise aspirations and prepare pupils for the next stage in their lives. As a result, the percentage of pupils who move on to sustained education, employment or training has improved considerably and is now, at 99.3%, well above the national average.

Pupils, parents and carers and staff highlight the care, support and nurture that staff give to vulnerable pupils and their families, particularly at difficult times in their lives. A typical comment from a parent was, 'Bedford is a well-run, caring school where the pupil is at the heart of decisions.'

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked you to ensure that activities that teachers plan match pupils' needs and to provide opportunities for teachers to share best practice in engaging pupils in their learning. You have successfully addressed both of these areas.

Your system of 'diagnosis, therapy and testing' gives teachers regular and detailed assessment information, which identifies pupils' strengths and weaknesses in each subject. As a result, teachers plan increasingly effective learning and intervention. They tailor compulsory after-school academic support during 'period six' to address identified gaps in the learning of individuals and groups.

You have made the most of opportunities to work with other schools to share strong practice in teaching. This has allowed your staff to learn from teachers and leaders in other schools. Visits to lessons, scrutiny of the work in pupils' books, discussions with pupils and comments from parents all indicate that, for the most part, pupils enjoy learning.

We agreed that leaders should build on improvements in mathematics and history and review arrangements for GCSE religious education.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your school is a vigilant community in which everyone understands the importance of safeguarding. All staff undertake regular training and know how to recognise the signs of extremism, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Discussions with pupils and staff, as well as scrutiny of the school's records, showed that staff act quickly when adults or pupils inform them of concerns. Pastoral staff use external expertise well and follow up referrals to outside agencies to ensure continuity of support and care. They organise records efficiently and keep them securely. Policies and procedures are up to date so that pupils remain safe and feel safe. The checks that schools must make on the suitability of staff to work with children are all in place.

Inspection findings

- GCSE results over the last three years show that in mathematics, humanities and religious education pupils did not achieve the grades of which they were capable. I was interested to know the reasons behind this and whether progress has improved for pupils currently in the school.

- In mathematics, there was considerable instability in staffing and leadership. This resulted in inconsistency in the quality of teaching. A new head of mathematics took up post in September 2017, and the department is now fully staffed with permanent full-time subject specialists. A lead practitioner from Byrchall High School has worked with teachers and with the new head of department. The head of department reviews pupils' progress and the quality of teaching very regularly so that practice improves. Your own assessment information and my scrutiny of work in pupils' books indicate that improved teaching and leadership have had a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, you acknowledged that further support is needed to ensure that the developing good practice remains consistent.
- In September 2017, to enhance standards and quality in humanities, you created a new head of faculty post and appointed an acting head of history. This has resulted in stronger leadership and accountability. However, your self-evaluation indicates that, while the teaching of history is improving, the department needs continued support and challenge to ensure that recent improvements in leadership and teaching are sustained.
- You enter the majority of pupils for GCSE religious education, but most do not achieve grades which match their capabilities. This is because you allocate too little curriculum time to this subject, especially in the case of pupils who study three separate sciences. You plan to review these arrangements.
- I wanted to know why pupils do so well in modern foreign languages and the reasons behind improvements in achievement in science. Both of these departments have benefited from strong and stable leadership and staffing. Consequently, the quality of teaching remains consistently high. An assistant headteacher leads and manages regular opportunities for teachers and leaders of other subjects to observe and learn from their peers in these and other successful departments in the school.
- In 2017, in modern foreign languages, the progress that most-able pupils made was in the top 20% nationally. In science, their progress showed considerable improvement over the last three years and was above average in 2017. However, in most subjects, including English, mathematics and humanities, this group underachieved. I wanted to know whether you have addressed this weakness. Your assessment information, which is rigorously moderated, indicates that most-able pupils are now making good progress taking into account their prior attainment. This is especially true in mathematics.
- During the inspection, I observed lessons and scrutinised books that showed clearly that in mathematics an increased focus on reasoning and problem solving has raised expectations of most-able pupils and enabled them to work at higher levels than previously. Across the curriculum, continuing professional development has ensured that teachers are skilled in implementing your 'thinking hard' strategy to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills and deepen their understanding of complex concepts. Well-planned and structured opportunities for them to discuss and develop ideas with their peers in class enhance this. Extra-curricular activities such as the successful debating society also contribute opportunities for pupils to shape and articulate their thinking while competing

against pupils from other schools. This helps to raise aspirations and expectations.

- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved year on year and is now only slightly below that made by their non-disadvantaged peers. I was interested to know the reasons behind this success and whether differences in progress have diminished further. Your assessment information indicates that these pupils continue to catch up with their peers.
- Leaders use funding well to address the precise difficulties which individual disadvantaged pupils face. You provide extra academic support after school and during weekends and holidays. For those pupils who would otherwise not be able to attend extra sessions, you use funding to provide transport. Skilled pastoral staff prioritise helping disadvantaged pupils and their families when social or emotional problems impede learning. Leaders frequently analyse the impact of spending in detail and adapt strategies if necessary. They take part, with other schools, in peer review of the effectiveness of their work with disadvantaged pupils and are thus able to reflect on and learn from practice seen elsewhere.
- The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities was below that of their peers last year. I wanted to find out whether this situation has improved. Most of the considerable number of pupils whom you admit to the school beyond the start of term one are disadvantaged and arrive with a legacy of weak attendance. Your staff work hard with these pupils and their families to ensure that they understand the importance of attending regularly. Your leaders were able to show that, for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, attendance is improving towards the levels achieved by their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on recent improvements in the leadership and teaching of mathematics and history
- they review arrangements for GCSE religious education.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Kelly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a meeting with you and your senior leadership team. I had a discussion with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. With some of your senior leaders, my inspector colleague and I visited lessons to observe teaching, and with senior and subject leaders we looked at pupils' work. With you and senior leaders, we discussed safeguarding, behaviour and attendance and the use and impact of the pupil premium funding. I spoke to a representative of Wigan Local Authority. We met a randomly selected group of pupils and a randomly selected group of staff. I took into account 53 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including eight free-text comments. I scrutinised 38 responses to the staff survey and 34 responses to the questionnaire for pupils. I examined a range of documentation, including your self-evaluation and development plans.