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Ms Jo Higgins
Principal
Penistone Grammar School
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Dear Ms Higgins

Short inspection of Penistone Grammar School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017 with Michael Cook and Marianne Young, 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 October 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 have made sure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is a strength across all subjects within the school. You and your leadership team spent time evaluating why subjects such as science were successful and focused on replicating this success across other areas of the school. As a result, all subjects have detailed curriculum plans that focus on high-quality teaching and regular assessment. Consequently the majority of pupils in all key stages continue to make good progress. You have rightly recognised that the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve and leaders at all levels are currently focused on supporting these pupils to achieve their best and to attend regularly.

Through your vision for the school you have developed an ethos of high expectations. As a result, pupils show respect and tolerance for each other, your staff and the building. Pupils are very rarely off task in lessons and show motivation to learn, particularly where the level of challenge is high. You have implemented a new behaviour policy that is focused on changing behaviours rather than managing them. In lessons observed by inspectors and through conversations with pupils, the majority of pupils show that they value the merits that staff regularly award to pupils when they behave well. You rightly recognise that getting all staff to be

consistent with the new behaviour system is a priority for the school.

At the last inspection, you were asked to make sure that pupils were clear about what they have achieved what to do next and that teachers check that pupils are following their advice. It is clear that teachers now adopt the school's assessment policy consistently. Pupils spend time improving the work that they produce. This is contributing to the improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

You and the leader of the sixth form also took swift action to deal with a dip in student progress in the sixth form in 2016. As a result, the leadership of the sixth form and the progress that students make are now strengths. The sixth-form leader has put robust and efficient processes in place to ensure that all students are effectively assessed, monitored and supported. Leaders across the sixth form work together to raise the attendance of all students and as a result, attendance figures for all groups of students are very high. Students adopt mature attitudes and behaviour, which they say supports their learning and progress. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and they say that the advice and guidance they receive helps them to make informed choices about their future.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that safeguarding at the school is effective through clear and consistently applied policies and procedures to keep pupils safe. Your child protection records are thorough and followed up appropriately. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues, including child sexual exploitation and domestic violence. Leaders know pupils and their families well, which results in pupils feeling safe and happy at the school. Pupils like that they can report any issues that they have confidentially using the school's online learning platform.

Nearly all pupils say that the school is a very tolerant and accepting community and that bullying is rare. Year 11 pupils say that bullying incidents in the school have decreased a lot during their time at school. You have set up a pupil-led anti-bullying committee that pupils say works well in preventing bullying. Pupils of all ages are very confident that staff will deal effectively with any problems they might have. This view is also supported by most parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, saying that their child is safe at school and that their child is well looked after.

The checks made on new staff are rigorous and the findings recorded in accordance with government requirements. Appropriate recruitment procedures are in place. Teachers have clear policies and practices to keep pupils safe in lessons, including practical lessons such as science and design and technology. Health and safety procedures are robust and pupils of different ages have a strong understanding of what they need to do to keep themselves safe within practical subjects.

Inspection findings

- You, your staff and governors are not complacent. You have reviewed the school's position with clarity and insight and as a result you have a focused and successful vision of continuing improvement.
- You have developed the strength of leadership in your school through effective professional staff development. Leaders work together well to ensure that leaders and teachers are held responsible for the progress of all groups of pupils. You have rightly recognised that the progress of disadvantaged pupils needs to improve and leaders at all levels are currently focused on these pupils. You have made structural changes to how senior and middle leaders routinely check the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This has made teachers more aware of the needs of these pupils. In some observations of learning, teachers addressed the specific needs of disadvantaged pupils effectively. This led to their progress being in line with that of their peers. However, this was not the case in all observations. You and other leaders are aware that teachers do not plan learning tasks consistently to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged pupils to make sure that gaps in their knowledge do not develop over time.
- At the last inspection, you were asked to make sure that work for the most able pupils provides additional challenge. You and other leaders have standardised how teachers plan the curriculum and how teachers routinely assess pupils. This has helped to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning, which is now more consistent across subjects and supports the increasingly good progress that more-able pupils make. You have also strengthened the level of challenge for all pupils through a consistent approach being used to set pupils' homework through the online learning platform. Homework now also makes a positive contribution to the good progress that pupils generally make.
- Pupils' good progress is evident in pupils' books and in the homework tasks they complete. Furthermore, the progress shown in the work of the most able disadvantaged pupils in geography, for example, demonstrates the improvements that are being made in some subjects. However, this is not consistent yet across all curriculum areas. In some learning observed by inspectors with senior leaders, the level of challenge for the most able pupils was inconsistent.
- Overall levels of attendance continue to be above the national average. The introduction of a new behaviour system ensures that good attendance is rewarded more explicitly. However, the impact that this is having on attendance is yet to be seen, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The new policy has seen a decrease in the number of disadvantaged pupils being excluded from school, yet you and other leaders recognise that the attendance rate for disadvantaged pupils is not good enough. All leaders and teachers are now focused on embedding procedures to improve the attendance of this group of pupils.
- You recognised that the outcomes achieved by students studying in the sixth form were not good enough in 2016. The leader of the sixth form now works strategically with middle leaders to raise the standards achieved by sixth-form students. Students' progress is now closely monitored and they are supported well across all subject areas. In learning observed by inspectors, students were challenged by the work set and showed a secure knowledge of their

examinations and what is expected of them to achieve the highest grades. This was a particular strength in English literature.

- As a result of this now strong leadership in the sixth form, together with the support that students receive, the progress that most students make in the sixth form, including that of disadvantaged students, has improved. Furthermore, and in contrast to 2016, students retaking the GCSE exams in English and mathematics now improve their grades by the end of their study programme.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they take swift steps to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- they ensure that all teachers put into place strategies to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils more consistently
- all staff apply the new behaviour system consistently.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Styles
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, inspectors held discussions with you and other senior leaders about your plans for improvement and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Inspectors also met with a group of middle leaders and met with a range of pupils from Years 10 and 11. Additionally, inspectors held a meeting with members of the governing body. Along with senior leaders, inspectors visited lessons to look at pupils' work and to observe teaching and learning. During lessons, inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects, including work produced in the sixth form. Inspectors also studied a range of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and school improvement. Inspectors considered the 224 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 217 free-text responses from parents.