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Mr Terry James
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Dear Mr James

Short inspection of Queens' School, Hertfordshire¹

Following my visit to the school with Lesley Daniel, Associate Inspector, on 5 November 2014, 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 under section 5 of the 2006 Education Act (as amended) since the school was judged to be good in Apr 2012. A link to that inspection report is here www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Information about this short inspection

During the inspection, we spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, teachers, students and three representatives of the governing body. We observed behaviour in and around the school, and made short visits to all classrooms during the morning of the inspection. We discussed the school's performance data with senior leaders, which can be found [here](#), and scrutinised safeguarding and other records. Inspectors looked at students' work and checked the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Inspectors also reviewed parental responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, [Parent View](#), which allows parents to contribute their views about the school.

This school continues to be a good school.

Leadership and management

¹ A short inspection evaluates whether a school that was judged good at the last inspection has maintained its performance.

Inspectors judged this school as good at the last full inspection. Since then, new appointments at every level have strengthened leadership further. The school is very popular in the wider community and is heavily over-subscribed.

The headteacher leads an effective and ambitious team of senior colleagues. He has created a very positive culture of high expectations across the school, including the sixth form. The students say that they enjoy coming to school because they are a part of a learning community. An increasingly large number of teachers, drawn from many departments and at all stages of their careers, are involved in spreading good practice and seeking ways of improving the quality of teaching. An example of this is the staff newsletter, entitled *Queens' Tales*, which is exclusively concerned with strategies and techniques to raise achievement. All contributions are written by teachers, drawing either on their own experiences or from research that they have undertaken.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and where it still needs to improve. They have tackled all but one of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The remaining issue, concerning the quality of feedback and marking that teachers provide, is the focus of ongoing work.

The school provides a broad range of subjects for students at GCSE and A level. It also offers a small number of vocational BTEC subjects. Students in Key Stage 3 follow the national curriculum. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities are offered, which are highly valued by students; one told inspectors that 'there is a club for everyone at this school'. Participation levels in sports, performing arts, foreign travel, and debating are high. The curriculum is enriched with opportunities for students to work independently. For example, sixth formers edit and publish a very high quality students' magazine. This provides students from all year groups with an opportunity to express their views on a range of subjects. The articles pitch current affairs alongside moral, political, spiritual and cultural issues. Many of the articles are exceptionally well-written and provide a strong contribution towards students' preparation for life in modern Britain.

Students in Year 7 come from a large number of different primary schools. At present teachers do not have access to precise and detailed assessment information about these students so that they can ensure that lessons match their abilities from the start of the autumn term. This means that some students who achieved the highest levels in Year 6 say they are finding the work too easy.

The governing body has become more strategic since the last inspection. Less time is now spent on operational issues and 'housekeeping', allowing for more focus on monitoring achievement and the quality of teaching. Governors are analysing school data more effectively and are working with school leaders to plan a clear direction for further improvement in raising achievement and the quality of teaching.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding were found by Her Majesty's Inspectors to meet requirements.

Achievement

Inspectors judged achievement to be good at the last full inspection. Students join the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are significantly above the national average. GCSE results continue to be above the national average in the majority of subjects. In many subjects, results are well-above national averages. The proportions of students achieving the very highest grades (A and A*) are high and are rising. Mathematics and English GCSE results are above national averages. Boys' achievement, which was lower than girls in 2013, improved significantly in 2014.

The achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium² was much better than the national average in 2013. In 2014 results dipped for this group and the attainment gap between them and other students widened.

Students in the sixth form continue to achieve well in most subjects. Results in some subjects, such as English literature, art and design, mathematics, photography and politics, are exceptionally high. Very large proportions of students achieve the highest grades in these subjects. Achievement in the Sports BTEC diploma is also very good. In those subjects where achievement is not as high, results are consistently above national averages.

Teaching

Inspectors judged teaching to be good at the last full inspection. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. Lessons are well planned and many teachers are seeking to extend the learning of more able students. Almost all teachers demand a high standard of presentation and, as a result, students' exercise books are neat, tidy and well organised. Referring to the 'can-do' ethos that teachers promote throughout the school, one student said that 'teachers are very good at providing us with the tools that we need to learn'.

As a result of improvements made following the last inspection, teachers are making better use of assessment data to set targets for students. Some teachers are providing students with high quality marking and feedback. Students are very clear that this feedback has a very positive impact on their learning. In contrast, other teachers are marking work less effectively. This is a current focus for improvement across the school.

Behaviour and safety

² Pupil premium is additional government funding for looked-after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals.

Inspectors judged this as good at the last full inspection.

Students report that disruption to lessons is extremely rare. Where it does occur it is dealt with swiftly, and support is provided in order that all students can learn effectively. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive for the overwhelming majority of students. They work hard and take their studies seriously. Students aspire to attend the sixth form and know that they must work hard to get there. Sixth formers are very good role models for younger students. Attendance is in line with the national average.

Next steps

- The school should improve its systems for gathering, and making use of, primary school assessment data.
- The school should continue to seek best practice in providing high quality feedback and marking for students in all subjects.

Her Majesty's Inspectors will continue to monitor this school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Regional School Commissioner for the East of England.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie

Her Majesty's Inspector

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