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Mr Steven Wilkinson
Headmaster
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Dear Mr Wilkinson

Short inspection of Spalding Grammar School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019 with Vondra Mays, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your evaluation of the school is clear and you know the school's strengths and areas that require further improvement. You have worked to address the issues identified from the previous inspection, particularly since 2017. For example, the school was asked to ensure a timely and strategic oversight of pupils' performance so that the most able pupils achieve the highest possible outcomes. You have put in place a new system for checking the quality of provision. This is underpinned by the use of common assessment tasks and clearer tracking of pupils' progress. This has been successful in many curriculum areas and subject leaders say that they have clearer guidance and expectations for leading improvement.

Published data in 2018 shows that, from their high starting points, pupils' overall progress has improved to above average, when compared to that of other pupils nationally. The progress made by pupils was exceptionally strong in mathematics, science and humanities subjects. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was also above average, an improvement on previous years. However, there are variations across the curriculum. Pupils' progress in English, despite some recent improvement, remains below average and pupils' progress in modern languages has dipped. While you have faced some challenging recruitment issues, improvements in these subject areas have not been as strong.

Governors are skilled and well informed about developments within the school. They have recently become more involved in supporting leaders' monitoring of development priorities. This includes establishing formal links with the leaders of different curriculum subjects. Inspectors' consideration of pupil, parent and staff surveys shows that the majority are happy to be part of the school community and would recommend the school to others. However, some have mixed views about the effectiveness of school communication.

The behaviour and conduct of pupils is good overall. The majority of pupils are polite, courteous and helpful. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally positive. Levels of exclusion are low, although the implementation of a new behaviour management policy has seen a recent rise in the frequency of reported low-level disruption. Attendance has remained above the national average for at least the last three years. The leader for personal development and behaviour has applied a range of strategies to further improve levels of attendance and these have been successful.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Appropriate checks are made on the recruitment of staff and volunteers to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. All staff and governors understand their safeguarding responsibilities. You have ensured that staff receive appropriate training and that the school site is secure.

The designated safeguarding lead ensures that record-keeping is of a good quality. Effective processes are in place to follow up issues in a timely and appropriate way. The school works well with a range of external agencies to support pupils to make sure that they are kept safe. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They know who they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns. This includes access to the school's 'well-being support officer' when pupils require additional care and support.

School records show that all incidents of bullying, which pastoral leaders are aware of, are dealt with. Pupils reported that incidences of bullying are low and that they are confident that any issues would be resolved if presented. Pupils also reported that they learn about how to keep themselves safe. Pupils talked about online safety, substance misuse and stranger awareness delivered through tutor time, assemblies and 'PaCE' lessons (Personal and Careers Development).

Inspection findings

- The recently appointed leader for the sixth form is committed to the future success of the post-16 provision. Procedures have been implemented to monitor the progress of all students and provide timely intervention for those who require additional support. Leaders are engaging with other post-16 providers in the region to further develop independent study skills and raise individual expectations. New approaches to making more effective use of students' personal

study time, for example, have recently been implemented. It is too soon, however, to see the impact of this on students' outcomes.

- Students who spoke to the lead inspector were typically positive about their experience in the sixth form. They reported their appreciation of improved careers advice and guidance, sixth-form facilities and enrichment visits across a range of subjects. Published data shows that the progress made by students in 2018 was average overall. There is some variation in students' performance, however, across a range of subjects. Students achieve well in science subjects, history and business studies, for example. Outcomes are weaker in subjects such as English language, ICT, psychology and law.
- The subject knowledge of teachers is good and is often used effectively to question pupils and so deepen their knowledge and understanding. Most learning is well planned and pupils follow instructions from their teachers promptly. In the most effective lessons, pupils responded positively to their teacher's enthusiasm and learning activities which challenged their thinking. This was observed by inspectors in music and business studies, for example. At times, however, the pace of learning was slower and pupils were not routinely challenged to make strong progress. Inspectors also found that pupils' written work and presentation were not routinely of a high quality across different subjects. Pupils report that they are positive about their learning experiences overall. At times, however, they say that teaching does not interest or enthuse them in their learning.
- Pupils say that they appreciate the range of extra-curricular opportunities that are provided by the school, including participation in inter-house competitions such as dodgeball and 'bake-off'. Additional examples include a range of sports, chess club, drama club and the opportunity to learn Polish.
- The previous inspection also called for a cohesive whole-school approach to support pupils' literacy and communication skills. The school's leader of 'communication for learning' has established cross-curricular approaches in support of developing pupils' confidence in the application of subject-specific terminology, connectives and their understanding of examination instructions. While early in its implementation, inspectors found that this strategy is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' routine use of complex vocabulary. Leaders continue to embed these strategies as part of curriculum planning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes at key stage 4 are further improved by enabling pupils, particularly the most able, to make consistently strong progress in English and modern foreign languages
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment consistently inspires and enthuses pupils about their learning so that they can thrive as independent learners.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you and other senior and middle leaders. Inspectors visited 14 parts of lessons across all key stages, to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. Visits were also made to tutor time sessions and a house assembly. Inspectors also held discussions with four groups of pupils representing all year groups. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding arrangements and record-keeping, which included the school's records of recruitment checks on staff, staff training and the processes in place for referrals made to external agencies. A discussion took place with the school's designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors looked at records about attendance and behaviour and examined a range of documentary evidence. These included the school's self-evaluation, development planning, school policies and information about pupils' current attainment and progress. A discussion was also held with a group of five governors.

The lead inspector looked at the 92 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, of which the majority of submissions were made by sixth-form students. The lead inspector also considered the views of 173 parents and carers through their response to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and considered the 29 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.