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Mrs Carolyn Roberts
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Carolyn Roberts

Short inspection of Thomas Tallis School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2018 with Beverley Johnston and Patricia Slonecki, 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 May 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You and the leadership team have undertaken sharp self-evaluation and identified the right priorities for improvement. This includes the urgent need to raise achievement in English and mathematics through the provision of high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. You recognise that there has been a legacy of underachievement in mathematics in particular, and too many pupils have not made the progress that they should. In addition, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils have not made enough progress in English to achieve the standards of which they are capable.

We agreed that the progress of current pupils in the school is now improving across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, these are early indications and there is insufficient evidence at the moment of the sustained impact required to produce better outcomes. Key initiatives in place are not yet well embedded and are only just beginning to have the desired impact.

The targets that you have set for improvement are realistic and achievable. Members of the governing body are well informed and have been fully involved in your evaluation. This inclusive approach means that leaders and governors have a shared understanding of what the school is now trying to achieve. Governors know

how effectively new developments are being carried out by leaders. They can be supportive when necessary, while also holding leaders to account.

Throughout the school, it was evident that pupils behave respectfully and conduct themselves well. You and your team have worked hard to ensure that all staff and pupils take personal responsibility for improving pupils' behaviour, in accordance with the school's behaviour policy. Pupils like the emphasis you have placed on rewards and the focus on doing things the 'Tallis way'. As a result, in most lessons, pupils work in a calm and purposeful learning environment.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's record of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with young people is accurately maintained and compliant. Policies related to safeguarding, including the child protection policy, are up to date and meet the requirements of statutory guidance.
- Staff receive appropriate training in all aspects of child protection, including the 'Prevent' duty to keep pupils safe from radicalisation. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about the well-being of a pupil. Appropriate and prompt referrals are made to external agencies where necessary. Records of such referrals are accurately kept and monitored to ensure that follow-up actions are timely and effective.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from a variety of risks, including safe use of the internet, social media and mobile technology. As a result, pupils have a sound awareness of e-safety and have the confidence to report any concerns.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, four areas of focus were agreed. The first of these was the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics. This was because the progress of disadvantaged pupils was well below average by the end of Year 11 in 2016 and 2017. Disadvantaged pupils comprised around 40% of the cohort and too many were underachieving in English and mathematics.
- You and the governors said that considerable thought has been given to the reasons for disadvantaged pupils' underachievement. You commissioned a mathematics consultant, partly funded by the local authority, to work with the department to investigate the issues and raise standards. The resulting strategies to raise achievement are showing early signs of being effective.
- Currently, disadvantaged pupils' progress in mathematics and English is stronger in key stage 3 than it is in key stage 4. This is because much time and effort has been invested by leaders in designing the right curriculum for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Work seen in pupils' books shows that progress in mathematics remains variable, but there is a more consistent picture of steady progress in English.

- The second area of focus for the inspection was the effectiveness of teaching in science and humanities. This was because, in 2017, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils made well below average progress in these subjects.
- Your regular analysis of pupils' achievement gives teachers the information they need to plan work at the appropriate level. In many lessons, teachers also use assessment information to adapt and to modify the learning as well as to identify any pupils who would benefit from additional support. Your approach has meant that more staff are setting aspirational targets for pupils to achieve the best possible progress, particularly disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. However, the use of assessment information is not yet fully consistent in the humanities and science subjects.
- The lessons we observed also showed some inconsistencies. In particular, teachers' questioning is sometimes not probing enough in challenging the most able pupils to think more deeply and to develop and refine their responses. In some subjects the most able pupils in particular are not challenged enough by the tasks they are set and do not make the progress that they should. Scrutiny of work shows that the most able pupils are not making consistently strong progress in science and geography.
- The school has a clear policy on feedback to pupils. Inspectors identified some strong practice. In history, for example, pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they find feedback from teachers helpful. Disadvantaged pupils' books demonstrated effective development of key skills and consolidation of knowledge as a result. However, the use of feedback is inconsistent. For example, in science, some teachers are still not following the school's policy closely enough to allow pupils to use the feedback to improve their work and to make faster progress.
- The third area of focus was to investigate the reasons why pupils appear to be achieving well in many of the subjects that do not comprise the English Baccalaureate. This was because, in 2016 and 2017, pupils made above-average progress in these subjects, including disadvantaged pupils.
- We sampled a range of subjects, including music, art, food technology and religious education. Many pupils displayed a love for these subjects and were enthused by what they were learning. Their teachers have expert subject knowledge and are adept at honing pupils' subject-specific skills. In addition, the school has strong links with the Tate Modern, enabling pupils to develop a wider appreciation of the cultural importance of art. Many disadvantaged pupils benefit from this, as well as from the provision of free instrumental music tuition in both key stages. As a result of this effective provision and enrichment, subjects like music and art are very popular and standards by the end of key stage 4 are above average.
- The final area of focus was pupils' attendance and the rates of exclusion. Since the previous inspection, attendance has at times been below the national average and the proportion of fixed-term exclusions has been high.
- We found that, overall, pupils' rates of attendance have improved and fixed-term exclusions have gone down. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and

those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are skilful at detecting and dealing with pupils' behavioural issues early. As a result, fewer pupils fall into the trap of repeating their misdemeanours and being excluded. Where there are concerns about persistent absence, leaders act swiftly and put in place the required support. Leaders speak knowledgeably about patterns of absence that relate to a small minority of pupils, and use this information well to ensure that attendance remains good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics and English are consistently strong so that pupils make good progress and achieve well, in particular disadvantaged pupils and the most able
- all teachers use information on pupils' attainment and progress to plan learning that meets pupils' needs more closely and challenges the most able pupils in particular
- systems already in place to improve the quality of feedback to pupils, in accordance with the school's own policy and procedures, are applied more consistently across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Nasim Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection started with your self-evaluation of the school's performance. We then agreed the lines of enquiry that the inspectors would follow during the inspection. Inspectors looked at school documentation, including attendance and exclusion records. Inspectors visited lessons, looked at work and had discussions with pupils. Other meetings were held with some subject leaders, pastoral leaders, and with the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector spoke with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and the local authority school improvement partner. In addition, inspectors considered responses to the staff survey, pupil survey and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.