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Mr Jacques Szemalikowski
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Szemalikowski

Short inspection of Hampstead School

Following my visit with Jill Thomas, Ofsted Inspector, to the school on 13 September 2016, 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

This school provides a well-organised and inspiring education for its pupils. It meets their diverse needs and aspirations well. Your consistent and principled leadership, over many years, inspires staff to give of their best. Senior and middle leaders have clearly defined responsibilities which they carry out effectively. Staff really like working at the school. They feel valued and very well supported. Leaders have ensured that they have very good opportunities for training and development, to which they contribute. Many staff have moved on to promoted posts internally and elsewhere. This is an exciting, dynamic place to work, and its vitality greatly benefits the pupils.

Pupils enjoy a diverse and broad curriculum; they achieve a range of appropriate qualifications depending on their interests and aptitudes. They make good progress in their lessons. There are many opportunities to take part in stimulating activities, in sport and the arts, for instance. Pupils are guided and taught consistently well. The school capably prepares them for a wide range of future types of employment and further study, including at top universities.

Parents and pupils take, for the most part, a very positive view of the school. One parent caught the mood when saying, 'Hampstead is a wonderful school where my child is taught well... is happy... and given lots of opportunities to engage with sporting and other activities... the teachers are amazing, and work really hard.' Even where parents have specific concerns, their general view is that the school listens

and works with them to overcome any problems.

The previous inspection report recommended improving teaching further by ensuring that work set in lessons more closely matched the precise needs of pupils. It also recommended checking more carefully still on the quality of teaching to promote constant further improvement. Work on these has progressed but the recommendations have been only partially met. This helps explain why, despite all of its many strengths, its energy and continuing improvement, the school has not yet reached its goal of being outstanding.

Some of the school's key management systems are not sharp enough to promote fully the even better provision and outcomes needed to be outstanding. The school's self-evaluation is succinct and broadly accurate. However, it does not always acutely analyse key weaknesses. For example, the fact that disadvantaged pupils are, over time, over-represented in exclusions is known to the school but reasons for this are not identified sufficiently well so that they can be worked on with precision and have sufficient impact. Although teaching has very many strengths, it still does not meet closely enough the particular and different needs of pupils across all groups. Some of the work is too easy for some pupils; at other times it can be too hard. Pupils themselves identify this. Again, the school's self-evaluation does not explain this sharply. In turn, the school improvement plan, although setting a clear general direction, does not target specific improvements precisely or challengingly enough. Consequently, still more is possible.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are effective and appropriately managed. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures, which they understand. Pupils themselves feel safe and well looked after, and parents agree with this. The school has good evidence that it meets closely the needs of pupils who may become vulnerable in some way. Year-group leaders play a vital role. External agencies are well involved alongside school staff and parents. The school makes systematic checks on staff and others who come into contact with the pupils, when they are recruited and as needed. The school understands very well, and acts on, its responsibilities to protect its pupils from extreme influences and to avoid radicalisation. Governors routinely check the school's processes. The recent extensive building work has been very well managed, with the school site kept secure, safe and welcoming.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, nearly three in every five pupils gained at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This showed an incremental improvement from the previous year, but remains a little below the national average. The school has very clear evidence that this cohort, including pupils from all groups, made good academic progress in relation to their starting points at Year 7. The school, reasonably, shows confidence that the current Year 11 cohort, and the other year groups, are also making strong progress.

- There was considerable improvement in A-level results in 2016, with many students reaching higher grades and their individual ambitious targets. This followed a change in leadership in the sixth form. The new leader shows very clear understanding of what needs to be improved and has set a good example in leading well-targeted change. In particular, improvements were successfully made in attendance, tracking of students' progress and next learning steps, and in aspects of pastoral provision. Post-16 students say that they are well and impartially guided about their current and future studies, with lots of effective support given to help them meet their aspirations.
- Teaching across the school is well focused and clear. Teachers explain things well and check that pupils understand. They show strong subject knowledge, which leads to generally high expectations of pupils, including those of high ability. Staff engage pupils' interest and commitment well. They manage pupils' behaviour effectively. These general and reasonably consistent strengths in teaching lead to the good progress pupils make.
- However, there is too little evidence of specific help and support being given in day-to-day lessons across subjects for pupils' different needs, including for those who have special educational needs. There are sometimes differences between how well different pupils fare in different subjects and lessons. Those with high prior attainment at times do better than those with low prior attainment and vice versa. Some parents, although pleased with the school overall, point out instances where they feel their children have not been challenged or supported quite enough in parts of their learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils, entitled to the support of pupil premium funding, generally fare well. They make consistently good progress in line with that of their peers, when compared with all pupils nationally. The school spends its pupil premium money carefully and creatively. The staff responsible for this evaluate the impact of the expenditure well. The school can show clearly that most-able disadvantaged pupils generally do well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. The school has an effective programme of bespoke interventions for these pupils, which is well organised and managed. However, as for other pupils, the systems for ensuring that the specific needs of these pupils are well met by staff in all lessons are not as rigorous.
- The school has many pupils who speak English as an additional language. Their needs are well met. These pupils learn English, including technical vocabulary, quickly. The pupils who read to me did so with confidence and accuracy, in their additional language. They could explain clearly how helpful the school is when teaching them English and reducing language as a barrier to learning.
- The school has an effective programme for promoting basic literacy where this is needed. Higher attaining readers can borrow suitable books from the library, with useful guidance; they read with confidence, accuracy and good comprehension.

- Pupils behave well and safely across the school. They show pride in their school and wear its uniform smartly. They are polite, friendly and compliant. In the assembly observed, pupils listened courteously and readily answered questions. Pupils and parents are generally pleased with behaviour; bullying occurs occasionally but is said by pupils to be dealt with well. In lessons, pupils listen carefully, are keen to ask and answer questions and, for the most part, make good levels of effort. In some of the key stage 3 teaching observed, some pupils lost concentration for short periods. This was much less prevalent among older pupils and learners.
- The school makes a relatively high number of fixed-term exclusions, though this is reducing. Over time, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils, are over-represented in exclusions.
- Pupils' attendance is at an average level and improving. The school has sound procedures for promoting good attendance, which are bearing fruit. Pupil premium funding is appropriately used to support some of this work and there have been clear improvements in attendance for disadvantaged pupils.
- The performance of staff is managed well through effective procedures.
- The governing body is suitably organised. Its members are well informed about the school. Governors ask some searching questions of senior leaders and there is evidence of valuable discussion in meetings, which uses the expertise of governors well and helps decision making. Nevertheless, at times, governors accept the answers to their questions from staff without focused challenge or follow-up. This can lead to a false sense of security when further improvements are in fact possible.
- The school and local authority enjoy a very positive and productive relationship. Local authority officers provide a useful sounding board for the headteacher and senior leaders. The school is actively and effectively involved in supporting the local education community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they sharpen up school self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, so that expectations for improvements in pupils' outcomes are always high, clearly targeted and measured carefully
- in lessons, work is consistently more challenging and specifically related to the needs of all groups of pupils, so that their achievement rises further.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited lessons in all year groups and most subjects, jointly with senior leaders, as well as an assembly. They held discussions with pupils and scrutinised their work. They heard pupils, of different levels of attainment, read. They observed around the school, including at breaktimes and during an assembly. They met with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, governors and a senior officer of the local authority. They considered the 91 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included written comments. They also reflected on confidential responses from pupils and members of staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. They evaluated documents, including the school improvement plans, self-evaluations, information about pupils' progress and minutes of meetings.