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12 March 2019

Mr Paul Boxall
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Dear Mr Boxall

Short inspection of Hadlow Rural Community School

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019 with Colin Lankester, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is increasingly popular, and you and your leadership team have the overwhelming support of parents, who value the opportunities for pupils to study a broad curriculum including land-based courses. Parents speak positively about the support and guidance that their children receive. A typical comment from a parent responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire was, 'I find the school supportive, caring and nurturing, whilst giving my daughter a great education and opportunities.'

You and your leadership team have been effective in improving the school further since the last inspection. For example, the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics has improved. Learning is planned well to ensure that all pupils are able to become more secure in their mathematical skills and the most able are stretched through more-challenging work.

Teaching in English and science is equally strong. Teachers' insightful and targeted questioning of pupils helps to strengthen and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. In subjects where pupils make stronger progress, tasks and activities are well matched to the pupils' starting points. In addition, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. They rise to the challenge and enjoy doing more-difficult work. Invariably, pupils are engaged and working with enthusiasm due to well-structured and carefully planned learning.

Leaders recognise that in a minority of subjects there are variations in the quality of teaching, particularly in humanities and languages, but leaders' actions are leading to

improvements. However, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve in humanities and languages are not as high as in English, mathematics and science.

A unique feature of the school is the opportunity for pupils to study land-based courses, for example agriculture, equine studies, horticulture and fisheries. The qualifications gained by Year 11 in land-based subjects do not count currently in the performance tables. However, pupils with these qualifications are able to progress to higher qualifications at further education colleges. Governors are committed to ensuring that the school provides land-based courses to meet the needs of the local rural economy. The courses are highly valued by parents. One parent commented, 'The land-based curriculum has been an essential element to increasing our children's much wider outlook on life.'

A further action point from the previous inspection was to improve attendance. You and your team have been very effective in improving attendance overall and for those pupils who are persistently absent. Recent attendance is broadly in line with the national average for similar schools.

Pupils are very enthusiastic about their school. Typically, they behave well both in lessons and around the school. The personal, social and health education curriculum prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain and they understand fundamental British values. Pupils state that the school encourages them to respect others. Inspectors found that pupils were polite and courteous and very willing to discuss their work. Pupils wear their uniform well and take pride in their work. The pupils commented that the school is a close community and one pupil said, 'This school is great.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that all staff and governors are suitably trained and aware of their responsibilities. Parents are highly positive about the school, as an overwhelming majority state that their children are happy, safe and very well supported.

A substantial majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they feel safe in school. This was confirmed through pupils' interviews, and discussions with pupils in lessons. Pupils are educated well to ensure that they are safe in their community, understanding the risks from gang culture, knife crime and drugs. They know how to keep themselves safe online and are aware of the risks of cyber bullying and radicalisation. Pupils reported that bullying is very infrequent, including homophobic and racist bullying, and that staff deal with it carefully when it occurs.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, the inspection team looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; how well the curriculum meets the needs of all learners; how well leaders ensure that the quality of teaching is of a consistently high standard, and the challenge that governors and leaders provide to the school.

- Inspectors found that pupils have the opportunity to experience a broad curriculum. Pupils are able to experience more aesthetic subjects, both within timetabled lessons and through the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are available, compared with the subjects available at the time of the last inspection. For example, pupils can now study art and drama at GCSE, as well as opportunities to experience music, philosophy and sports as part of the extra-curricular provision. Typically, pupils take geography or history and a modern foreign language in key stage 3 and as part of their GCSE choices. Consequently, a high number of pupils are taking the EBacc suite of subjects at GCSE. Pupils' curriculum offer is augmented further by a comprehensive extra-curricular programme that all pupils take part in.
- Inspectors looked at how well leaders ensure that the quality of teaching is of a consistently high standard. Senior leaders have implemented rigorous monitoring processes setting clear action points for subject leaders to ensure that pupils' progress improves further. For example, in mathematics teachers adapt learning effectively to ensure that pupils are able to become more secure in their knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, the most able pupils are provided with challenging work to enable them to attain higher standards.
- Leaders recognise that continued support for subject leaders is required to improve the quality of teaching further in humanities and modern foreign languages. Leaders are enabling the sharing of good practice by pairing subject leaders together and facilitating visits to other schools. Consequently, subject leaders and teachers are able to broaden their knowledge, to be reflective, and evaluate their own teaching to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Governors have a very clear vision for the further development of the school. They believe that the school is an integral part of the local community and governors wish to support the rural economy by pupils having the opportunity to take land-based courses. Governors provide effective challenge to leaders. They hold leaders to account well and they know the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors manage the school's finances well and they work closely with Hadlow College to provide additional services to the school that helps to reduce costs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve teaching and learning so that all are as consistently strong as the best
- pupils achieve at least as well as other pupils nationally across all subjects, particularly in humanities and modern foreign languages.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Lee
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior team, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors. They observed learning in 15 classes, some jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and reviewed a sample of pupils' work, including disadvantaged pupils' books from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors took account of the 143 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and one letter from a parent. They also took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey. They met with groups of pupils, representing Years 7, 9, and 11 and considered the 72 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' achievement and attendance, safeguarding information, policies, the school website and minutes of governors' meetings.