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Mr Shaun Simmons
Principal
The Marsh Academy
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Dear Mr Simmons

Short inspection of The Marsh Academy

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017 with Frederick Valletta, 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 Marsh Academy was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide effective leadership and are determined to continuously improve the school. Leaders use precise and honest analysis of information when evaluating the school's strengths and areas to develop. This approach is leading to better consistency in the quality of teaching and subsequently improving pupils' outcomes. The governing body and board of trustees are highly effective and provide you with the correct balance of support and challenge. Governors know the school well and carry out their statutory duties strategically.

During our visits to classrooms, pupils participated positively in their lessons. The behaviour around the school created a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Both staff and pupils are keen to learn and improve their skills. The school promotes an inclusive environment that encourages pupils to be respectful and to have positive attitudes. The dialogue between pupils and their teachers, regarding their progress, is frank and open. Consequently, pupils' learning is deepened in many lessons and their ability to pursue their own studies and learn well is improving.

Since the last inspection, you have rightly focused on addressing the identified areas for improvement. These areas included increasing the level of challenge for the most able pupils and encouraging pupils to read more widely. You have prioritised the development of reading and given pupils many more opportunities to read than in the past. Across subjects, school staff are robustly tracking the most able pupils and offering timely intervention to support the learning needs of these

pupils. Individualised e-learning packages encourage pupils and offer challenging tasks, helping pupils to review their learning and identify areas where greater support is needed. Pupils increasingly appreciate and understand what they need to do to improve.

Internal assessment information shows that currently the most able pupils are making good progress and performing much better than their predecessors. You demonstrated to me how this improvement has been achieved through leaders' careful and tenacious actions. With other leaders, you also have a sound understanding of the isolated areas where weaknesses in teaching and learning remain. The senior leadership team's comprehensive action plans accurately identify areas for improvement and outline appropriate steps to tackle them.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Regular, effective training keeps leaders and staff well informed and up to date. Staff adhere consistently to the school's thorough policies for keeping pupils safe. Pupils report that they feel safe and know who to approach should they have concerns. Pupils' attendance has improved since the previous inspection as a result of effective strategies and the high quality of pastoral care. However, attendance remains below the national average.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we focused particularly on how well leaders identify and address areas of relatively weaker performance, disadvantaged and most-able pupils, safeguarding and attendance.
- Leaders have improved attendance over time. In particular, significant gains have been made with the increased attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Effective use of pupil premium funding is evident with the introduction of a girls' motivation group, which has improved the attendance of disadvantaged girls. Overall, disadvantaged pupils perform in line with their peers and in a few subject areas these pupils perform better than other pupils. Leaders monitor and review the expenditure of pupil premium funding routinely to ensure that it is being put to best use.
- Senior leaders monitor the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning routinely. We observed some highly effective questioning in lessons during our learning walks with senior leaders.
- The school's leaders act effectively to support the emerging and differing needs of learners. For example, kinaesthetic tasks were observed in key stage 4 mathematics and were adapted to meet the needs of the most able pupils. In addition, leaders have built effective assessment systems across the school, for example in the sixth form. Sharing good practice is actively encouraged and outcomes have improved as a result.

- Senior leaders ensure that the school's assessment procedures are accurate and rigorous, including through checking them with skilled and experienced advisers. Leaders are fully aware of and tackling the few remaining inconsistencies in teachers' use of the school's assessment policies.
- You use your exceptionally detailed knowledge and close monitoring of pupils' progress to provide additional support at an early stage, especially in key stage 3. Staff are not at risk of becoming complacent because you have led by example and created a shared desire for continual improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- check thoroughly that evident improvements in the achievement of the most able pupils are sustained
- build on the work to bring the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, girls and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities at least in line with national averages
- secure high-quality teaching and learning across the curriculum.

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

Gerard Strong
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with school leaders, other staff, governors, a representative from the local authority, parents and pupils. They visited classrooms with senior leaders, talking to pupils and looking at their work. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in and out of the classroom. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including leaders' self-evaluation of the school's performance, development planning, policies, attendance and behaviour tracking information. Inspectors also considered the views of 128 parents, 125 pupils and 65 staff who responded to Ofsted's online surveys.