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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Sonia Singleton
Principal
Gartree High School
Ridge Way
Oadby
Leicester
Leicestershire
LE2 5TQ

Dear Ms Singleton

No formal designation inspection of Gartree High School

Following my visit with Jason Brooks, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 9 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under Section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because schools judged to be outstanding are exempt from inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 unless they undergo significant change. Gartree High School underwent such a change when pupils moved into key stage 4 in 2017. The first set of GCSE results is due to be received in summer 2019.

Evidence

Inspectors met with you, senior and middle leaders, and members of the governing body. They met with a group of teachers and subject leaders. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around school. They met groups of pupils from both key stage 3 and key stage 4. Inspectors observed behaviour as pupils arrived in the morning, at breaktime, at lunchtime and between lessons. Inspectors considered 136 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the views of pupils and staff through surveys conducted by the school.

Inspectors visited nine lessons with senior leaders and discussed the quality of teaching and learning observed. During these visits, inspectors looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with them to evaluate the quality of their learning.

A number of documents were scrutinised, including records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance; their current attainment and progress; and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The school's self-evaluation documents and

plans for improvement were considered. The lead inspector also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, including the school's recruitment checks on staff and volunteers.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school continues to be outstanding.

Context

The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school, with 711 pupils currently on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than the national average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. A smaller percentage of pupils have an education, health and care plan than the national average. In 2017, provision was added in key stage 4. The school now provides education for pupils aged between 11 and 16.

Since the transition to 11 to 16, an assistant headteacher has been appointed along with a number of new subject leaders.

Main findings

The school continues to provide an outstanding quality of education. You and your team are aspirational for pupils' success and their best interests, sustaining a purposeful balance between academic challenge and personal and creative developments. You have high expectations which you have successfully shared with staff and pupils. The school is a welcoming environment with a positive culture. Staff work in a highly collaborative way to reach the school's goals. A very skilled senior leadership team effectively supports you. Staff morale is very positive.

Leaders and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. There is a determination to sustain high standards despite the challenges presented by a new key stage, changes to the local catchment area and feeder primary schools. Leaders are committed to bring about continued improvement. The priorities for development are identified with precision and supported by key actions. However, there is some variability in how leaders, including subject leaders, evaluate the impact of improvement strategies. This is because planning does not always make explicit the criteria by which success can be measured. While the spending of additional government funding for the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up learning is clearly identified, leaders do not evaluate the impact of it sharply enough.

The governing body is committed and ambitious for the school. Governors provide effective support and challenge, holding you stringently to account through the high

quality of information they receive from leaders. The headteacher's termly report provides governors with a rich knowledge about school organisation and improvement. This is complemented by regular visits by governors into school. However, governors have not questioned whether the pupil premium funding is used sufficiently well.

Leaders have successfully implemented the school's well considered curriculum in key stage 4. It is broad and balanced, with the flexibility to adapt to meet the needs and aspirations of all groups of pupils. The curriculum offers pupils the opportunity to study subjects such as astronomy and dance. While the majority of pupils follow a curriculum designed to achieve the English Baccalaureate, a range of vocational courses are available for individual pupils. Leaders have ensured that staff feel confident to deliver GCSE courses through their attendance at local and national training. In addition, new staff with the skills and expertise to provide high-quality teaching and learning in key stage 4 have been recruited. Opportunities for pupils to engage in extra-curricular activity are wide and varied. 'Enrichment at Gartree' recently included a cycling trip to Paris.

The leadership of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. This includes pupils who attend the resource base for hearing impairment. Leaders track the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities carefully and intervene swiftly to address any concerns. Liaison with parents and external agencies is very positive and purposeful. Teachers support pupils well in lessons and additional adults are deployed effectively to ensure that pupils are able to access the curriculum and make at least good progress. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are fully included in all aspects of school life and this was demonstrated by their participation in a Year 7 singing event taking place on the day of the inspection.

Teaching is of high quality. Pupils' attitudes are exceptionally positive, and they are fully engaged and motivated by their learning experiences. Teachers swiftly rectify any distractions to pupils' attention or learning. They have strong subject knowledge, which they use very effectively to question and deepen pupils' understanding. Teachers know their pupils well and maintain informative class profiles so that they know which pupils require greater support. They have very high expectations of, and are aspirational for, pupils. Lessons are carefully planned and resourced so that pupils are challenged in their thinking. A strong emphasis is placed on literacy and the accurate application of specific subject terminology.

Teaching is complemented by a rigorous approach to assessment. Teachers use their assessments of pupils effectively to check understanding and to clear up any misconceptions that pupils have. Teachers expertly demonstrate to pupils what successful learning looks like, and this is accompanied by clear and precise explanations. This was illustrated well in a history lesson when pupils were learning about the challenges being faced by Germany after the First World War. Pupils were required to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a prepared written assessment answer and discuss their findings. Pupils were then presented with a range of

challenging improvement tasks so that they could apply their learning. The quality of verbal and written feedback provided to pupils by teachers is high. Pupils know when they have been successful in their learning and how they can improve. However, the extent to which pupils act on the helpful advice they are given is less consistent. Pupils say that they appreciate the high level of support that teachers provide, including opportunities for extended learning and homework support after school.

Leaders are fully aware of the developments required to advance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. There is a whole-school focus on developing pupils' learning skills and styles from 'dependence' to 'independence'.

Pupils have not yet taken any external examinations. School information indicates that current pupils are on track to achieve highly in 2019 across a range of subjects. Leaders are aware of some variations in current attainment between the very high attainment in physics and the comparatively lower attainment in biology. Leaders are taking appropriate action to address this. They set targets which are highly aspirational. The quality of learning in lessons and the work being completed by pupils accurately reflects leaders' assertion that strong progress is being made in key stage 3, and that this is being sustained across Years 10 and 11. Current internal assessment information suggests that the proportion of pupils achieving both the standard pass and secure pass or better, in a range of subjects including English and mathematics, will compare favourably with current national figures.

The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school site is exemplary. They consistently demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning and promptly follow instructions given by staff. In lessons, inspectors observed many confident learners. Pupils take pride in their work and this is reflected in the high standard of presentation. The quality of presentation is also an indication of the high standards that are expected at this school. The school has a positive and inclusive culture. Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. Pupils are very well mannered and polite. They behave responsibly and interact with their peers very positively during unstructured time. No disrespectful behaviour was observed at any time. Pupils say that incidences of bullying are very rare and that they are confident that staff would deal with any issues effectively.

Exclusions are used rarely and there have been no permanent exclusions since the school expanded into key stage 4. Internal exclusion is also used rarely. The attendance of pupils is good and improving, including the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders monitor attendance very closely and act swiftly when issues are presented.

The personal development of pupils is taken very seriously. A comprehensive curriculum plan is in place which covers a wide range of themes across all year groups, including online safety, healthy relationships, child sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Pupils appreciate the contribution this makes towards their personal well-being.

Safeguarding is effective.

The recruitment and induction of new staff is meticulous with all appropriate checks being made before they commence employment. The training for safeguarding, including regular updates throughout the school year, is of a very high quality. Responses to safeguarding concerns are prompt and no time is wasted in referring any such concerns to outside agencies. The designated leader has a firm grasp of all aspects of safeguarding and maintains accurate records of concerns. Good links with parents and external agencies have been developed. Leaders have established a culture of vigilance and this includes safeguarding pupils from radicalisation and extremist views. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey agree. Pupils say that they know who they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns.

External support

Leaders continue to receive effective support from a local school improvement partner. The school is also part of the 11-16 Excellence Group. This is a collaboration of schools in Leicestershire which works to provide a wide range of training opportunities and share best practice. The school's participation in this network has been integral to the successful expansion into key stage 4. The Excellence Group has aided subject leaders in the design and planning of examination courses. It has helped to add external validation to the school's pupil-progress tracking system through moderation and standardisation of assessments across the curriculum. All staff who spoke with inspectors valued highly the training opportunities available to them.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that all improvement plans contain clear criteria against which success can be measured
- incisively evaluate the impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding so that it is clear which actions are having the greatest impact on pupils' attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector