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Mrs Karen Kerridge
Headteacher
The Appleton School
Croft Road
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Dear Mrs Kerridge

No formal designation inspection of The Appleton School

Following my visit with Cathy Tooze, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26 September 2017, 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 you have added an extra key stage to the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, 11 sixth-form students, two members of the governing body, two representatives of the local authority and a director of the trust.

Inspectors scrutinised the school improvement plan, self-evaluation documentation, progress data and a report following a visit by the regional schools commissioner.

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

Senior leaders and governors have established an effective sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

The school is larger than the average secondary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average. There are fewer pupils who speak English as an additional language than average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. There are fewer than average pupils included in the school's register of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school during the academic year is below average.

Effectiveness of the new sixth form

Your diligent leadership has ensured that the opening of the new sixth form has been a success. You have monitored the performance of students in the sixth form and been quick to address any weaknesses in provision. You have been highly proactive in seeking support from the local authority and other schools. As a result, most students in the sixth form make at least as much progress as their peers nationally.

The new sixth form offers an appropriately diverse curriculum. Students study either an academic programme, a vocational programme, or a combination of both. The curriculum offer is effective in meeting the needs of students in the local area.

Students leaving the sixth form in 2017 all moved on to either education, employment or training. You have high expectations of students and raise their aspirations. You guide them to choose a pathway which is right for them. 72% of those who left Year 13 in 2017 are now at university and 11% have begun apprenticeships.

You have developed effective teaching across most subjects in the sixth form. Your analysis of what could be better following the 2016 examination results led to significant improvements. You sought support from a range of sources, including the local authority and other high-performing schools. You analysed examination papers and arranged for staff to be trained by representatives from the examination boards. Subject leaders and teachers work collaboratively and discuss good practice. The progress students now make is significantly better than in 2016.

Teaching is characteristically underpinned by accurate subject knowledge and strong relationships with students. Students have highly positive attitudes to learning. Across most subjects, teaching supports most students to make progress which is at least in line with others nationally. Teaching is particularly effective when the work is hard enough to make pupils think deeply. This is not yet a consistent feature of lessons across the sixth form. Therefore, pupils do not routinely make substantial progress.

You have implemented effective strategies to improve students' achievement in a range of subjects. In psychology, for example, leaders have focused on developing students' understanding of scientific topics. In mathematics, leaders use assessment information precisely to put in extra support for students in topics which they find hard. In both subjects, most students are currently working at or above their target grade. You are aware that some variation remains in the quality of teaching in A-level subjects and are taking effective steps to address this. Subjects performing less well, such as economics and physics, have focused action plans to improve.

Across the sixth form, leaders track the progress of students and intervene to support those who fall behind. As a result, the progress students make in A-level subjects is in line with their peers nationally. In BTEC National Diplomas, the progress students make is greater than that of their peers nationally.

Safeguarding is effective. You ensure that staff are well trained to understand child protection and that they report any concerns they may have. You track safeguarding concerns carefully and are vigilant in pursuing the assistance of others in resolving them. Students experiencing difficulties receive the right support. You ensure that leaders have time to fulfil their safeguarding duties. They undertake additional training to maintain an up-to-date understanding of the risks in society. When particular concerns arise at the school, leaders take appropriate steps to reduce the dangers students could face.

External support

Representatives from the local authority are enthusiastic about their collaboration with school leaders. School leaders actively seek out advice and use it to improve the work they do. As a result, teaching in the sixth form has improved.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to improve the progress pupils make by:
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently good or better in all A-level subjects, so that students consistently make substantial progress
 - ensuring that teachers in all subjects routinely give the most able students work which is hard enough.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andy Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector