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Mr Chris Willsher
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Willsher

Short inspection of Priestlands School

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are determined and passionate about standards in your school, while remaining approachable and warm. You keep a close eye on the daily workings of the school so that no task is seen as too unimportant to do well, such as serving pupils at lunchtime. You have also managed a difficult financial situation skilfully, as well as the challenges of recruiting high-quality staff. Pupils and staff clearly appreciate how you encourage them to do their best and how they can learn from their mistakes. Parents describe the school as 'amazing, with a real family atmosphere', and say you are an 'inspiration who always makes time for children'.

You and your leaders model the school values 'learn more, do more, be more' very well. You have established a very effective leadership team, who have high expectations and model them in the classroom and in their work with staff. You have rightly focused on improving teaching as your main priority. You have strengthened your leadership team and put in place a range of strategies to improve teaching. You have taken difficult decisions about staffing because you have refused to compromise on the quality of staff employed. As a result, teaching across the school is now strong, with some very strong elements.

You have established good partnerships with the local primary and junior schools to improve the transition for pupils. As a result, you know the children well when

they arrive and they make a strong start in key stage 3. There are also strong links with the local teaching alliances to support staff training and the implementation of the new key stage 4 curriculum. There are good links with the local 16–19 providers so that the vast majority of pupils go on to achieve well in their next stage of education. You are also considering developing your own 16–19 provision so that you can provide a more local offer for pupils who currently have to travel long distances.

Staff are hugely positive about the school and enjoy working there because they are well supported and are part of a highly motivated team. The systems to reward performance are coherent, tailored to individuals and include opportunities for further training and development. Staff know what is expected of them because leaders communicate the key priorities well. Staff value the way that leaders have created a climate in which they can take risks and innovate. As a result, staff work diligently to achieve the highest standards for pupils across the school.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively. You have developed a new assessment system that is well used by the vast majority of staff to plan more effectively to meet the needs of the different starting points of pupils. Middle leaders are also now using achievement information much more confidently than in the past to evaluate the quality of teaching and achievement in their areas. As a result, pupils who left in 2016 made good progress from their starting points across a wide range of measures.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are suitable systems in place to check on the recruitment of staff. Those staff with additional responsibility are well trained and provide useful and regular information to the rest of the staff. These frequent updates ensure that all staff are knowledgeable about how to keep children safe. Governors regularly scrutinise school procedures and check that leaders are taking the appropriate actions to support vulnerable pupils. As a result, these pupils are doing well and are well supported. Leaders also work well with other agencies and resolutely pursue the best outcomes for pupils. Consequently, parents and pupils are very positive about the care and support that they receive, especially those who need additional help.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. They stringently evaluate what works and have sturdy plans in place to address areas that require further attention. Staff across the school, including those only recently appointed, were able to describe the main areas for improvement and the actions taken to address them in their subjects.
- Leaders have established clear expectations for teachers in planning and assessing learning. They regularly check that all staff are meeting these expectations and provide support when necessary for those who need it. Subject leaders are now more confident in refining the school system to fit

the demands of their subject. For example, teachers in mathematics have skilfully adapted the school's planning so that they can be more explicit about stretching the most able pupils in each class.

- Governors are a significant strength of the school because they constantly reflect on how they could improve their and the school's performance. They have changed the structure of the governing body to refocus and sharpen their scrutiny of leaders' work. They have a good overview of the effectiveness of additional funding and other critical areas because they assign key people with expertise to oversee these. As a result, they are a more strategic, more challenging and more effective group than in the past.
- You and your leaders have developed your assessment system effectively. You have accurate and useful information about individuals, on groups and in key stages that you use to evaluate the progress of pupils. As a result, senior and middle leaders are now making better use of this information to plan additional intervention for pupils who need support to catch up or to attain the highest grades.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in English and mathematics was well above the national average in 2016. Pupils make especially good progress in English because the subject leader has established a high-performing and highly effective team. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often, and are taught reading skills effectively so that they achieve well.
- Pupils' progress is increasingly strong in mathematics. In 2016, pupils' overall progress was well above the national average. Leaders have worked hard to introduce a new curriculum that stretches the most able pupils. Evidence from books and from lessons shows that this is increasingly the case. Pupils are developing their reasoning and problem-solving skills at a greater depth, as well as gaining confidence in applying their mathematical knowledge to practical tasks. However, not all staff are as confident as the subject leader in using these new approaches consistently.
- In 2016, pupils' attainment in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects was just above the national average. Leaders recognise that more of their pupils should achieve this measure and have taken steps to ensure that this will be the case. Current information shows that more pupils are on track to achieve this measure than in the past.
- In 2015, disadvantaged pupils' attainment improved and this remained the case in 2016. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils made less progress than their peers in 2016. Current information shows that this is still the case in key stage 3, although the differences are diminishing because leaders are addressing this. Equally, leaders have taken effective action to resolve previous low performance in key stage 4, with disadvantaged pupils now doing as well as others in a wide range of subjects. Crucially, a higher proportion of the most able disadvantaged pupils are currently on track to achieve the EBacc measure than in the past.
- In the past, pupils have done less well in science than you expected because teaching was not sufficiently strong. You have taken urgent action

to address this and there is now new leadership in place. While there are early signs of improvements in science such as high-quality questioning and raised expectations for pupils' written work, there are still some significant issues to address. The quality of assessment in science is lower than in the rest of the school and not all pupils, including the most able, are receiving good advice and guidance to improve their work. The work to tailor the curriculum to better meet the needs of different groups of pupils is also at an early stage.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making progress in line with the national average. There are good systems in place to support them, such as the nurture group, and staff are well trained so they have a good understanding of the needs of individual children. Leaders adapt the curriculum skilfully and deploy resources creatively to suit the needs of their pupils. For example, the animals and plants in the walled garden provide pupils with opportunities to learn about the food cycle, animal husbandry and caring for the environment. Those pupils who tend the pigs and goats also learn leadership skills that prepare them well for their next stage of education.
- You have identified that some pupils in your community need to develop their resilience and confidence. You have established a school-wide approach that is well used by all staff to ensure that pupils can reflect on their mistakes, learn from them and develop more staying power when faced with challenges. As a result, pupils talk confidently about how they can improve their work and try hard to do their best. Inspectors saw this 'can do' attitude in a range of different subjects, especially in languages, art and physical education (PE).
- Pupils and parents are very enthusiastic about the many opportunities the school provides for learning outside the classroom. Activities week, Friday morning rugby and the equestrian club are a small sample of the extensive activities available that support and enrich the curriculum.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils did not attend as well as others. This is still the case, as although the attendance of all pupils is above the national average, disadvantaged pupils continue to attend less than others. Leaders and governors have taken action to address this by increasing the amount of support available for families and pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving but there are still too many disadvantaged pupils who are frequently absent from school.
- Pupils are friendly, polite and respectful of each other. They behave very well, they are knowledgeable about the risks of social media and confident about who to talk to if they have any concerns. They are proud of their school and the difference they make to school life. The student leaders are especially effective and have brought about significant changes to the school, such as the introduction of a house system.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further reduce the overall absence of disadvantaged pupils, especially those who are frequently absent
- accelerate the actions to improve teaching in science so that all pupils make stronger progress over time from their starting points.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

For this inspection, inspectors focused on the quality of safeguarding, actions taken since the previous inspection, the progress of disadvantaged pupils, the quality of teaching of science, the progress of the most able pupils (including the disadvantaged most able pupils) and the impact of leadership in the school. Inspectors visited the school for one day. They met with you, your leaders, staff and governors as well as making a phone call to the headteacher of the local alternative provision. Policies around safeguarding, your own analyses of pupils' achievement and other documents were scrutinised. Inspectors visited, with leaders, all year groups to see teaching and learning across a wide range of subjects. There were informal and formal meetings with pupils, as well as listening to Year 7 pupils read in English. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in lessons with leaders, in particular science and mathematics books, especially the most able pupils' books. The 200 parent responses to Parent View, the 88 staff responses and 322 pupil responses to the Ofsted survey were also analysed.