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Mrs Penny Johnson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Johnson

### **Short inspection of Grays Convent High School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with Vanessa Love, 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 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Since your appointment as headteacher in April 2014, you have worked relentlessly to establish high expectations among staff and pupils. You lead the school by setting the highest example, insisting on complete integrity in the work of your staff and leaders. Your dedicated and skilled governing body work alongside you diligently to continue to raise standards and expectations in the school and community. Most pupils and parents are glowing in their praise for the school. As one pupil told inspectors, 'The whole school is like a family.'

The spiritual and moral values that underpin the Catholic ethos of the school support a harmonious learning environment where pupils appreciate the importance of diversity and equality. You and your team live and breathe your shared vision to 'empower young women to discover and realise their full potential'. You all work tirelessly to ensure that pupils receive vast and meaningful opportunities to develop as young leaders both within the school and representing the school regionally and nationally. Pupils undertake leadership roles such as Year 7 transition leaders, eco schools ambassadors, trailblazer leaders and subject prefects with enthusiasm and rigour. You are incredibly proud of your pupils and what they go on to achieve once they leave you. This is epitomised in the way you celebrate the achievements of your past pupils throughout the school halls.

You put the welfare of the young women in your charge at the heart of the school's work. On occasion, the issues that young women face during their time with you can be challenging. However, you and your governors face these challenges head-on, without fear, putting the welfare of young people first and foremost in your work. Consequently, by the time pupils leave your school, they are articulate, confident, kind and well-qualified young women, ready to make a successful start on their post-16 education.

When you first arrived, the results that pupils achieved by the end of Year 11 had dipped. You acted swiftly to raise standards in teaching, learning and assessment in a secure and sustainable way. Since 2015, the achievement of pupils in Year 11 has continued to go from strength to strength, despite changes in national accountability measures. In 2017, the progress that pupils made in Year 11 examinations was significantly above the national average, with pupils making particularly exceptional progress in English. Pupils in Year 11 also made very strong progress in a number of other subjects, including mathematics.

Despite the obvious strengths in the school's provision, you refuse to be complacent. You acknowledge that there is more work to do to ensure that staff use the information that you provide to them so that pupils make the rapid progress of which they are capable in lessons, particularly those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Moreover, while you have ensured good attendance of pupils overall in the school, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is not consistently matching the good attendance of pupils nationally.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding is effective in the school. Leaders, including governors, have created a culture where pupils feel safe and well cared for. Regular visitors, assemblies and lessons keep pupils and parents up to date with how to keep themselves safe in school and in the wider world. The pastoral teams provide some of the most vulnerable pupils and their families with highly effective support and guidance.

You undertake thorough and regular checks of all your staff and provide them with routine training. As a result, staff are vigilant and professional about their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Training is effective in giving staff the most up-to-date information about the possible signs of abuse. They use this training to make referrals to the designated safeguarding leader. Referrals to children's services are timely and appropriate.

### **Inspection findings**

- Our first line of enquiry was to review how leaders had acted on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection – in particular, that teachers used starting points effectively to support pupils' progress, and that good practice in teaching in the school was shared widely.

- You and your team have worked hard to act on these areas for improvement. You have established a thorough monitoring system, and associated staff training, to raise standards across the school. A big focus of your work has been to train staff to use assessment information to plan appropriately for the pupils in their lessons. Consequently, pupils receive a good diet in numerous areas of the curriculum, and sometimes better, for example in English. Where you have had wider concerns in the past, such as in design and technology, you have acted quickly to improve the quality of provision, and this has improved pupils' outcomes.
- However, you have faced some challenges to establishing this level of consistency in teaching, learning and assessment. Staffing recruitment and retention have been difficult in the last two years for the school, especially but not exclusively in modern foreign languages. For a variety of reasons, including promotion and retirement, you have had to replace a significant proportion of staff, sometimes at short notice, and induct new staff. This included a recent restructure of your leadership team following the retirement of one of your longer-standing senior leaders.
- Despite this, you have ensured that staffing has been well deployed to bring sustained and continued improvement to standards in Year 11, although you acknowledge that this consistency is not yet as well embedded elsewhere in the school.
- Our second line of enquiry was to look at the support for pupils who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. This was because despite sustained improvements in all pupils' outcomes since 2015, the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were not as consistently strong.
- However, in 2017, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in Year 11 made very good progress and attained in line with other pupils nationally. In particular, they made exceptional progress in English. This was because you used the additional funding that you received well and focused your work so that these pupils received the right support and guidance. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 achieved well.
- You have also worked hard to provide high-quality information, advice and guidance that raises the aspirations of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the number of pupils progressing to appropriate post-16 destinations is a much-improved picture since the previous inspection. In the last two years, all your pupils have gone on to, and sustained, appropriate post-16 choices.
- Across all years, your assistant headteacher with responsibility for this area has worked hard to gather information on disadvantaged pupils so that teachers have an insight into how best to engage pupils in their learning.
- However, your leaders, who observed with inspectors, identified some inconsistency in disadvantaged pupils' experiences. While most pupils are very keen to do well and work very hard, some teachers do not ensure that they use a thorough knowledge of what pupils know and can do to plan really engaging activities or challenge pupils to learn rapidly across lessons. On occasion,

teachers miss signs that these pupils are not working to their full potential, or are losing interest.

- Our final line of enquiry was to review the support that you give to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is because small numbers of these pupils in each year group mean that published data do not give a clear picture of how well they are achieving.
- Your leader for SEN tenaciously follows through on the centralised support that she offers to pupils. She provides teachers with high-quality guidance on the strategies that they need to employ to support pupils' very specific needs. However, some staff are not yet using this information thoroughly when planning and teaching to ensure that these pupils are making good progress from their varied starting points.
- We also reviewed the attendance of pupils as part of these key lines of enquiry. Owing to leaders' work to ensure that pupils value their education, the attendance of all pupils at the school has been in line with, or better than, the national average for a number of years.
- However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities was below average in 2016 and did not improve in 2017, while the proportions who are persistently absent is also high. Leaders, some of whom are new to post, are reviewing your strategies to improve the attendance of these groups of pupils, but this work is not yet fully embedded.
- Additional to the lines of enquiry, we also reviewed your work with parents. Most parents are highly positive about the school's work. Leaders and governors give parents many opportunities to raise any concerns and resolve issues through a variety of forums. However, a small proportion of parents in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, did not recommend the school. This is not reflective of the school's own surveys of parents, which occur routinely throughout the school year.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff use the precise guidance provided by leaders, including assessment information, when planning and teaching – particularly about how to engage and support the specific learning needs of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities,
- they continue to improve the attendance and reduce the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, so that their attendance is at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we spoke with you, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, pastoral staff and teachers. We also met with members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. We spoke with a representative from the local authority. We visited classes in English, mathematics, science, art, languages, history and geography. Most of these visits were undertaken with either yourself or members of your team. We looked at pupils' work while we were in lessons. You were not able to send out the pupil questionnaires. However, while on site, we spoke with pupils throughout the day, and met with a group of pupils formally. We took account of Parent View responses from 47 parents, as well as 31 staff responses. We also took account of the school's own survey of parents. We reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding.