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Mr Roland Marsh  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Marsh

### **Short inspection of Applemore College**

Following my visit to the school on 14 February 2017 with Andrew Foster, 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 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 lead the school with clarity and conviction and are ably supported by your senior and middle leaders and a strong governing body. You all share a clear moral purpose to provide the very best education for the pupils in the school. Since the last inspection, you have strengthened the way in which leaders evaluate the effectiveness of provision and how you hold them to account. All of you know your school very well and have correctly identified where improvements should be made.

This school is characterised by a caring, inclusive and nurturing ethos. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils, which are the bedrock of a very positive atmosphere in which pupils want to learn. Staff use their extensive knowledge of pupils to provide the best support possible for each of them to develop their learning and understanding. As a result, pupils make good, and sometimes better, progress. Staff and governors are ambitious for pupils' futures, encouraging them to have high aspirations for what they can do and achieve. Staff encourage pupils, particularly the most able, to aim for challenging professions. Pupils appreciate what staff do for them and therefore typically they behave well, both in lessons and around the school.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified that pupils would make more

rapid progress if: teachers expected more of the most able pupils; teachers planned lessons that more closely matched the needs and abilities of all groups of pupils; and pupils knew how to improve their work.

Leaders and governors have tackled these issues effectively. The most able pupils now make better progress than at the time of the last inspection. You have implemented a comprehensive training programme which has helped staff to develop strategies in the classroom to accelerate these pupils' progress. However, you recognise that there is still more to do and you have plans to involve the school in an action research project with external partners to do just this.

Staff now use progress data more routinely to ensure that they keep track of each pupil's progress and set them challenging work to do which better matches their needs. Consequently, pupils are making better progress and achieving more highly. Teachers also make sure that pupils know how to improve their work. However, you recognise that this policy is not yet applied as consistently as you would like.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding is a high priority within the school and there is an established culture of keeping pupils safe. There are several specially trained safeguarding staff and evidence of strong teamwork within the student support team, which meets regularly to discuss pupils of concern. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that record-keeping is thorough and methodical. Leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment and governors are involved in staff interviews. Staff and governor training on safeguarding issues is robust and there are regular updates throughout the year. Governors check that all processes and policies are up to date on a continuous basis.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and they appreciate the support they receive from staff if they have a problem. They say that bullying is rare and they know whom to go to if they have a concern. Parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe at the school.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, we looked closely at disadvantaged pupils' progress. This continues to be an area of uncompromising focus and all staff are aware of the need to accelerate these pupils' progress. There is no evidence that the dip seen in disadvantaged pupils' progress in 2016 will be repeated. Leaders now identify support that pupils need early on so that interventions can be swiftly put in place. A number of strategies are having a positive effect on pupils' progress such as the mentoring programme, individualised timetables and extra tuition in English and mathematics. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully and help is put in place in subjects where they are falling behind. Leaders regularly review the strategies to see which ones are working best and then make changes if they are not generating rapid progress. In addition, leaders have reviewed the curriculum to make sure that it provides opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to develop their

basic skills. You have rightly identified that there is still more to do in this regard, particularly at key stage 3, and you plan to develop a Years 5 to 8 curriculum with local primary schools in the very near future. There is some very good practice within the school, such as in English. However, you recognise that there are some inconsistencies in effectiveness between, and sometimes within, departments.

- Another aspect of the school's provision I considered with you was leaders' focus on providing more-challenging work for most-able pupils. You recognise that you need to raise these pupils' aspirations and ambitions, and encourage and support them to reach the highest grades in every subject. Overall, the most able pupils are making solid progress in class and they are challenged at a level that matches their understanding and progress. It is particularly strong in English. However, you recognise that the challenge needs to be even greater for these pupils and that sometimes staff do not expect enough of them, particularly in terms of giving them clear advice about how they can improve their work.
- Attendance, which has been below average in the past for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is improving. The recently appointed attendance officer is working hard to reach vulnerable families needing support and is liaising well with outside agencies. This is beginning to have an impact on improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, in order to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils in particular, you recognise that they need to be in school more regularly. Therefore, attendance needs to be a priority for all staff, not just those in the dedicated attendance team. You recognise that leaders need to have a greater awareness of the attendance of different groups of pupils. Governors also appreciate that they could do more to challenge leaders on this issue.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is an even greater focus on providing more challenging work for the most able pupils so that they achieve the highest grades possible
- staff apply greater consistency in helping pupils to understand the next steps in their learning, particularly the most able
- there is a greater whole-school focus on the attendance of groups so that all staff see it as a shared responsibility, not just that of the dedicated attendance team.

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

Yours sincerely

Paula Sargent  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, middle leaders and the attendance team. I also met members of the governing body and the local authority school improvement representative. We met with pupils in different year groups, both formally and informally, to discuss their learning and their views about school life. Together with members of your leadership team, we looked at learning in a variety of subjects across different year groups. An inspector also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books with a member of your leadership team. We looked at school documentation, including current assessment information, the school's improvement plan, its self-evaluation, minutes of governors' meetings, attendance information for current pupils and a report written by the local authority representative. Inspectors considered 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including these parents' written comments. Inspectors also took into account responses by 22 staff and 90 pupils to their questionnaires.