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28 April 2017

Mr Liam Collins
Headteacher
Uplands Community College
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Dear Mr Collins

Short inspection of Uplands Community College

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017 with Ann Fearon, 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 July 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 and your leadership team continue to strive to provide the best possible education for each pupil. You are well supported by the staff and a dedicated and well-informed governing body in your drive to achieve this. Parents are positive in their comments. As one parent said, 'I am impressed by the caring and supportive nature of the staff.'

At the last inspection, inspectors noted several strengths, including strong leadership, good teaching and rising attainment, as well as pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning. You have maintained and continued to build on these strengths.

Inspectors also highlighted some aspects for specific attention. One was the need for leaders to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching and learning across the school. They advised that pupils in the main school should develop the skills for independent learning. They also advised that teachers should check that all pupils act on feedback given to them.

You have taken effective action to address these recommendations. Your teachers benefit from high-quality training. In addition, you have made recent appointments of strong and experienced teachers, including to key leadership positions. As a result, teaching is consistently strong and improving. Pupils also make good use of the feedback they receive from their teachers to improve their work.

At the last inspection, inspectors also highlighted the need to raise attendance levels overall and reduce the numbers of pupils who are persistently absent. In addition, they identified that leaders needed to set more challenging targets in the sixth form. The actions you have taken to address these recommendations have had some success. For example, attendance overall is now above the national average and rising numbers of sixth-form students apply for higher education or further training. At the same time, you recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly and that all subjects perform strongly in the sixth form.

Pupils' progress in 2016 was above average overall in many subjects and well above average in English and languages. You recognise that progress in mathematics was not so strong, especially for disadvantaged pupils. You have made appropriate changes to address this, including the use of pupil premium funding to provide additional support to these pupils. Consequently, current achievement information from mock examinations shows that pupils in Year 11 are on track to achieve well.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a strong culture of safeguarding that runs throughout the school. This is well supported by an effective safeguarding system that makes sure that all pupils are secure. Procedures and policies meet statutory requirements.

You, as the designated safeguarding leader, receive good support from your effective deputies. Leaders and governors have been appropriately trained in safeguarding and child protection, including safer recruitment procedures. Training of staff and governors is both comprehensive and regular. For example, staff that join the school mid-year receive appropriate training. Your staff are aware of the signs to look out for that may indicate that a pupil is at risk of harm and take swift action when necessary to support vulnerable children.

Leaders work effectively with outside agencies, such as social services and the police, as required, to support vulnerable pupils. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school, and this is strongly supported by the views of parents. One parent reported, 'Both our children are really happy at Uplands.' Pupils are aware of how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. Instances of bullying are very rare. When they do arise, staff deal with them swiftly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- During the meeting with you at the start of the day, we discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. These included:
 - the effectiveness of safeguarding
 - the effectiveness of the measures taken to further improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
 - the extent to which the sixth-form study programme components are met,

and how effective leaders have been in improving achievement

- the effectiveness of actions taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Progress for the small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school has been strong in English and languages. However, you recognise that this has not been the case in mathematics and humanities. You have subsequently taken effective action to address this, which includes the recent appointment of a new head of mathematics. As a result, evidence from learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work and current assessment data show that progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving.
- Leaders have continued to make effective use of pupil premium funding over time to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, differences between the progress of these pupils and that of others in the school and nationally have diminished. In English and languages, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is greater than that of other pupils nationally.
- Provision in the sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme. Students say that they enjoy life in the school and that levels of aspiration have increased. They are well supported in preparation for life beyond Uplands Community College because leaders provide effective support for students moving on to higher education and training. As a result, the number of applications to universities and apprenticeships has increased.
- Progress in several sixth-form subjects in 2016 was below the national average, notably in geography, psychology and mathematics.
- Attendance overall is above average compared to national figures. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been of concern for the school. Leaders and other staff have worked hard to improve this. Tracking and monitoring of attendance have now improved. You and the staff promote and reward good attendance in assemblies. In addition, leaders have recently appointed a student support manager to undertake home visits and develop increasingly effective relationships with those families of disadvantaged pupils at risk of reduced attendance. Early indications are that the attendance of these groups of pupils is improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the most effective strategies to improve the attendance of those few pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, who currently attend less well
- they improve the effectiveness of leadership in the sixth form so that more students make better progress in all subjects, especially geography, psychology and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

David Powell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. During the day, inspectors held further discussions with you, other senior leaders and staff. I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Inspectors, accompanied by your senior leaders, visited eight lessons. In addition, a selection of pupils' work from different key stages was scrutinised jointly with school leaders. Inspectors took account of 110 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered written comments completed by 107 parents. There were 50 responses recorded by staff and 37 responses recorded by pupils on the online questionnaires. Inspectors also met with a group of students from Years 12 and 13. Inspectors analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including: leaders' checks on pupils' progress; attendance and behaviour information; and safeguarding policies and procedures.