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Ms Ann Francis
Academy Head
Harrogate High School
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Dear Ms Francis

Short inspection of Harrogate High School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2017 with Mike Tull, Her Majesty's 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. Your dedicated, determined and decisive leadership has contributed to the school improving since the previous inspection. You, other leaders and staff are aspirational and ambitious that every pupil or sixth-form student who attends Harrogate High School leaves with the very best experience and qualifications to set them up for their futures. As a result, pupils continue to make good progress, and, because of this, all pupils and sixth-form students consistently go on to some form of further education, employment or training.

You have created a school ethos that focuses on mutual respect and high expectations. As a result, most pupils are keen to learn and work hard. Pupils try their best and want to do well. They move around the school calmly and orderly. Pupils are well supervised. Pupils wear their uniforms with pride. They are respectful to each other, staff and visitors. Pupils are confident and work well together to share ideas and support one another in their learning.

Pupils, in the main school, and students, in the sixth form, speak about their teachers and the extra effort teachers put in for them with gushing pride and heartfelt gratitude. They are truly grateful for all that teachers do for them. Very occasionally in lessons, the concentration of pupils wanes, particularly that of the most able disadvantaged pupils. This is because learning does not challenge them sufficiently. Leaders acknowledge that this sometimes happens. They know that they need to check that all pupils are challenged sufficiently.

You, other leaders and governors have an accurate and clear understanding of the school's strengths and a candid and realistic view about the areas that need further attention. Leaders at all levels continually check the effectiveness of their work, making sure that any strategies aimed at bringing about improvement are implemented consistently and with vigour. Leaders have taken effective action to speed up students' progress in academic subjects in the sixth form, although they acknowledge that recent improvements now need to be maintained and further strengthened. Similarly, leaders know that some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school as often as they should. Their actions to promote good attendance with pupils and families are paying off. More disadvantaged pupils are now attending school regularly. Even so, a few still do not attend regularly enough.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked tirelessly to develop and build leadership at all levels. Senior and middle leaders contribute significantly to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school and within their subject areas. Leaders are supportive of each other and both senior and middle leaders meet regularly to discuss and evaluate any actions they have taken to improve aspects of the school's work. Middle leaders, for example, share your determination and ambition for the pupils in the school. As a result, there is a focused and thoughtful approach to professional development. Staff appreciate professional development opportunities. They humbly say such opportunities are regular and help them to improve as practitioners. Staff also appreciate the support they receive from middle and senior leaders. This has led to staff morale being high.

Governors contribute significantly to the life of the school and to the strength in leadership and management. The chair of the governing body is an active member of the school community and he, alongside other governors, provides appropriate challenge and support so that improvement is continuous. Governors share your high expectations of pupils and staff, and they are proud of the pupils and staff that are a part of Harrogate High School.

The school is a part of Northern Stars Academies Trust (NSAT). Leaders from NSAT form a strong, supportive and effective partnership with Harrogate High School that has enabled the school to improve aspects of its work further. NSAT has provided support and guidance in relation to both school improvement and staff development opportunities. This has been particularly welcome in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in science, for example.

The vast majority of parents, pupils and staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaires were very positive about the school. Most pupils said that they enjoy school and that they enjoy learning at the school. Also, most said they would recommend the school to a friend moving to the area. Similarly, most parents said their children are happy at the school and feel safe at school. Most parents would recommend the school to another parent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure the school is an inclusive community environment and they place a high priority on safeguarding. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders keep staff and governors up to date about safeguarding matters through a regular programme of training and updates. All staff have received training across a range of areas, including the 'Prevent' duty. Staff understand the school's safeguarding policies, including how to recognise any signs that a pupil may be at risk, and they know what to do if they have any concerns.

Pupils feel safe. They say bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that if any incident occurs staff will deal with it effectively. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from a variety of risks through the vertical mentoring programme. Pupils spoke confidently about what they had learned; for example, awareness linked to staying safe online and mental health issues. As a result, pupils feel they are well equipped to recognise and deal with risks effectively. The majority of pupils that completed Ofsted's online questionnaire and those spoken to during the inspection believe the school encourages everyone to be treated equally and that diversity is celebrated.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching by making sure that teachers consistently used information from assessing pupils' abilities so that learning tasks met their varying needs. You have developed a thorough process for checking and tracking pupils' skills, knowledge and progress, both for different pupil groups and for individual pupils. You have worked hard to ensure that assessments are accurate and reliable. Typically, work is closely matched to pupils' varying needs and abilities. This, along with effective support, is helping pupils to make faster progress. Provisional results from examinations in 2017 show improvements in pupils' progress, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with high and middle prior attainment. Even so, some pupils are still not consistently challenged, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils. Leaders need to continue to check this carefully.
- The previous inspection also asked you to ensure that pupils who have very basic reading skills receive extra support to improve their phonic skills. Leaders have used additional funding to support pupils who need to catch up in their literacy, and numeracy, skills thoughtfully and effectively. Tailored programmes of support have had an extremely positive impact on improving pupils' reading skills. Pupils' problem-solving skills have also strengthened. Leaders acknowledge that pupils' improved literacy and numeracy skills are also helping them to make stronger progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Achievement in science was also an area of focus for this inspection because pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 in this subject has been below average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. In 2016, the proportion of pupils attaining a GCSE in science was well below average. Leaders carry out regular and high-quality checks of the quality of teaching in science and this has helped

to ensure that they provide bespoke professional development for individual teachers. The director of science for NSAT has played a key role in helping to bring about improvements in teaching, providing strong and effective support. Current pupils are now making good progress in science. Teaching is good. Teachers question pupils well to check their understanding and to quickly and effectively tackle any misconceptions. Work in pupils' books show that pupils are applying their knowledge and practising their skills well. As a result, attainment in science is rising.

- During the inspection, I wanted to check how well students are doing in the sixth form. This is because outcomes in published results show that students' performance in academic subjects has been variable in the last few years. Inspection evidence confirms that sixth-form provision is good. Applied general qualifications continue to be a significant strength of the provision. Current students are making good progress across a wide range of subjects. This is due to good teaching and effective academic and pastoral support. Leaders' rigorous checks of teaching and students' progress has helped to strengthen pupils' performance, especially in academic subjects. In 2017, provisional examination results show improvement in outcomes in English literature, English language, sociology and psychology. The newly appointed sixth-form leader is very ambitious. He has ensured that expectations of what students can achieve are high and that these are understood. Leaders are well aware that more still needs to be done to sustain and continue the recent improvements seen, particularly in academic subjects.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. This reflects their enjoyment of school. However, a small group of disadvantaged pupils, some of whom have social and emotional needs, have been absent from school too often in recent years. Leaders have, rightly, identified that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils needed to improve. Leaders' persistent and determined actions to bring this about, such as communicating promptly with parents if their child is not in school, home visits and rewarding pupils for their good attendance, are now starting to pay off. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is improving. Even so, a few disadvantaged pupils are still absent too often. Leaders know that they need to check the impact of their actions even closer so that these pupils attend school regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they continue to check carefully that all pupils, particularly the most able disadvantaged pupils, are being continually challenged in their learning
- the recent improvements seen in outcomes in the sixth form are sustained and improved further, particularly outcomes in academic subjects
- disadvantaged pupils attend school more regularly.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with a group of governors and representatives from the multi-academy trust. The inspection team observed pupils and students' learning in different lessons in the main school and sixth form. All of this learning was observed jointly with you or other senior leaders. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school. They spoke with pupils informally and met formally with a group of Year 9 and 10 pupils, and a group of Year 12 and 13 students. In addition, inspectors also completed a detailed work scrutiny from the main school and sixth form. Inspectors considered a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, and teaching and learning. Inspectors also considered the views of 67 parents given on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 64 free-text responses. Inspectors also took into account 50 pupil responses and 65 staff responses from those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaires.