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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of Northwood School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018 with Andrew Maher, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders at all levels have highly effective strategies for improvement, based on precise evaluations of what works and where areas for further development exist. Consequently, since the last inspection pupils' outcomes have continued to improve and their progress has been consistently high at GCSE. No group of pupils underperforms compared to their peers. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are very well supported because all staff understand those pupils' needs and incorporate that understanding into their planning. Disadvantaged pupils do much better than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, and have done so for at least the past two years in Year 11. Strong progress is a feature of pupils' learning throughout the school and across subjects, including in the currently very small sixth form. Where relative weaknesses exist in pupils' performance or in particular subjects, leaders' actions rapidly improve the situation.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place safeguarding at the heart of the school's work. They have ensured that essential systems, procedures and checks, including checks made on staff, are robust and accurate. Record-keeping is meticulous. Leaders and governors understand the risks that

pupils face in the local area and more broadly. Leaders and staff are vigilant and ensure that pupils have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe inside and outside school. Pupils are happy at this school and reported consistently to inspectors how they like it here because they feel safe and very well supported by teachers and would recommend the school to their friends.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors and leaders agreed to explore the extent to which the school had made progress against the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Inspectors focused on the provision for the 16 to 19 study programmes in order to understand the school's plans for expansion, and the impact of the sixth form on current students' performance. Inspectors also explored whether the largely Ebacc-focused curriculum (mathematics, English, science, geography or history, and a modern foreign language) was supporting pupils for whom that pathway is not best suited.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have refined their evaluation of all aspects of the school's performance. Careful analysis of the effect of strategies to support pupils' performance defines precise plans for development. For example, teachers focus on pupils' needs when planning learning as a result of sustained professional development in specific areas, including assessment and feedback. There is now consistency in the way that assessment is used to support effective learning.
- The most able are challenged across the curriculum because teachers anticipate stretching all pupils through well-chosen activities. Teachers and pupils share high expectations. One way in which this is observed in lessons is through the superb questioning that teachers use to enhance pupils' understanding and in the way that pupils happily rise to the challenge.
- Middle leaders have played a crucial role in securing the consistently high standards that inspectors found. Clear and robust line management means that all staff are held to account for the impact of their work on pupils' development. Pupils' writing, for example, is of a very high standard across subjects because all teachers and support staff recognise the significance of this skill to support wider learning.
- The sixth form is a very small provision, having shrunk in size over the past few years. Progress on vocational courses has been significantly better than average during that time because of the good match between students' prior attainment and the courses that they choose. The vast majority of pupils leaving Year 11 since the last inspection have gone onto further education, employment or training because of the effective advice and guidance that they received. Students who have completed 16 to 19 study programmes at this school have all gone onto appropriate courses at university.
- Sixth-form students reported that they enjoy school because of the bespoke learning opportunities that they receive as a consequence of its size. They also told inspectors that they would welcome further opportunities to learn about aspects of adult life. In Years 7 to 11, pupils regularly receive effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. However, the PSHE programme in the sixth form is currently not as well organised and effective.
- Leaders are relaunching the sixth form in September 2018 with a far wider range of courses on offer. Applications are currently much greater than the current number on

roll because pupils in Year 11 recognise the strengths of the school and leaders' renewed commitment to the sixth-form provision. This is informed by the opening of the new building and recent appointment of an experienced sixth-form leader.

- Pupils across year groups and subjects made sustained and significant progress from their starting points. At GCSE, pupils' progress has been within the top 20% of schools nationally, including disadvantaged pupils, for at least the last two years. Progress on courses outside of the Ebacc is strong, particularly for pupils with lower prior attainment.
- The highly effective programme of pastoral support includes help for pupils when they make their GCSE choices. Staff ensure that pupils choose the right range of subjects to suit their ability and high aspirations, even if that means not selecting humanities or a modern foreign language. Consequently, pupils' excellent progress means that they also attain highly across the board.
- Inspectors observed pupils enjoying their learning in a range of subjects and year groups, including mathematics, English, science, modern foreign languages, humanities, sport, design and technology, and drama. Inspectors found that teachers consistently share the same high expectations for pupils' performance, which is, in part, responsible for the strong work being undertaken.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- PSHE education in the sixth form is as effective at supporting students' personal development as it is in Years 7 to 11
- the relaunched sixth form builds effectively on the school's existing significant strengths in teaching and learning, so that students make consistently strong progress from their starting points on suitable courses.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hillingdon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Tiplin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with staff, members of the local governing body and pupils from Years 7 to 13. Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and social interactions during break and lunchtime and held informal conversations with pupils throughout. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including: the single central record of pre-

employment checks; safeguarding documentation; assessment and behaviour information; policies and procedures; leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for development.