

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



12 March 2020

Mr Tim Harris
Headteacher
Colyton Grammar School
Whitwell Lane
Colyford
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6HN

Dear Mr Harris

No formal designation inspection of Colyton Grammar School

Following my visit with John White, Matthew Collins and Steve Taylor, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 10–11 March 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of the quality of education and leadership and management in the school (including governance).

Evidence

We looked closely at English, mathematics, history, art, religious education and modern foreign languages. As part of this work, we visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils, teachers and subject leaders. We also spoke to trustees, the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), the special educational needs coordinator, the pupil premium coordinator and other staff responsible for pupils' personal development and well-being. In addition, we scrutinised documents, including the school's self-evaluation, attendance and behaviour records, the single central record and minutes of trustee meetings. Furthermore, we considered 270 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school continues to be outstanding.

Context

Colyton Grammar School is an 11–18 selective school with 954 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are white British. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupil mobility is well below the national average. The school is fully staffed.

Quality of Education

The quality of education provided at the school is exceptional. Across year groups and subjects, staff have the highest possible expectations of pupils. Leaders and staff know that pupils thrive on a high level of challenge. They ensure that the curriculum continually delivers this challenge. The school's culture is one of high achievement and pupils expect a great deal of themselves.

Pupils love learning at this school. They are intellectually curious and keen to discover new things, from Year 7 through to Year 13. Pupils, particularly in the sixth form, delight in asking questions, sharing their views and 'sparring' through discussion and debate. They relish the good-natured academic challenge and enjoy such exchanges. For example, in A-Level English, groups of students take pleasure in their competing efforts to find points of comparison between Shakespeare's 'King Lear' and Pinter's 'Betrayal'.

Pupils' love of learning is the product of many complementary factors. They are exceedingly well taught, follow an enriching curriculum and feel valued as individuals within a high-achieving culture, regardless of their background or needs.

You and other leaders have constructed a curriculum that prepares pupils very well for their next steps within and beyond school. Nearly all pupils stay on into the sixth form and complete a seven-year education at the school. Leaders have given consideration to the breadth and depth of this programme over the seven years and how it should develop to meet pupils' needs at different stages. All pupils study 11 GCSEs, including the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, religious education and a number of option choices. From Year 7, pupils study separate sciences. Leaders' choices, such as these, ensure that pupils are well equipped for the future, given their ability and expectations.

Subject leaders are clear about what they want pupils to know and be able to do at different stages of their educational careers. They have thought carefully about end points to ensure that the curriculum remains sufficiently challenging as pupils move up through it. They have fashioned programmes of study and schemes of work that contribute to a cohesive whole. Subject leaders talk about the 'spiral' shape of the curriculum, whereby opportunities are built in for pupils to revisit what they are

taught to ensure they remember it. Staff use different forms of assessment to establish what pupils know, ensuring that pupils receive whatever support is required to keep up. Pupils' work shows that the curriculum in different subjects is taught successfully. Pupils across the school acquire rich bodies of knowledge that enable them to make very strong progress.

Subject leaders do not work in individual silos. They look for opportunities to make links with other subjects to reinforce connections and broaden pupils' contextual knowledge. Leaders understand that this approach helps pupils to better understand and interpret the world beyond the confines of any given examination specification. This work is also bolstered by the extensive range of extra-curricular visits, clubs and activities that are available to pupils. For example, during the inspection, the head of the BBC's natural history unit came to speak to Year 10 pupils.

Teachers use excellent subject knowledge to plan work and activities that stimulate and engage pupils. These activities are underpinned by academic, artistic and intellectual rigour. Teachers report that they receive appropriate support and professional development to develop their craft to a high level. Teaching is also characterised by probing, insightful questioning on the part of staff, which whets pupils' interest. Questioning encourages pupils to offer up articulate, well-considered views that deepen and widen debate further.

Pupils benefit from very positive relationships with their teachers. In classrooms, there is a palpable atmosphere of mutual respect and admiration. In every lesson that we visited, pupils were enthusiastically attentive and quick to settle to work. They happily worked independently on individual pieces of work or cooperatively in groups, depending on what was required. Pupils who spoke with us made comments such as 'teachers know a lot', 'the teachers are superb' and 'they [staff] always try to give you a way to improve'.

Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are very well supported. As a result of this bespoke support, these pupils make very strong progress. Moreover, for some measures, the progress of disadvantaged pupils exceeds their peers. This is because you, other leaders and staff expect the same of these pupils as their peers. Last year 18% of disadvantaged students went to Oxford or Cambridge and 79% attended Russell Group universities. Additionally, all disadvantaged pupils were entered for the EBacc last year.

Outcomes at this school are outstanding. Progress and attainment across all subjects at GCSE are in the highest 20% of schools nationally, as was also the case last year. This success is replicated when students leave the school at the end of Year 13.

Leadership and management

You and other leaders have a clear, distinctive vision for the school that has the curriculum at its heart. You have fostered a culture in which high-ability pupils are challenged to achieve their best and make the progress of which they are capable. Within a supportive environment, staff ensure that pupils not only achieve highly but are happy and content. You want them to thrive within school and in their lives after school. This is why leaders have prioritised pupils' well-being and mental health.

Leaders, at all levels, are pulling in the same direction. This is, in the main, because of your measured, understated and tenacious leadership. You ensure that staff understand the moral imperative of their work, namely to do their best by these very able pupils. You have allied other leaders and staff to a common sense of purpose. Consequently, leaders work together in a collegiate, constructive way. This is evident in the consistency and high quality of the school's work across subjects and departments.

Subject leaders are passionately committed to their subjects. They feel trusted by senior leaders to take responsibility for their work and are encouraged to put their own individual stamp on it. Subject leaders, in turn, work effectively with their teams to plan programmes of study and schemes of work. This means that staff across the school feel they have a stake in the curriculum they deliver to pupils and care about what they are teaching.

Staff report that leaders manage workload effectively and take account of staff well-being. Staff recognise that teaching is a hard job. Nevertheless, they say that leaders do what they can to minimise the strains and stresses that occur at different times of the academic year. For example, leaders have revisited the marking policy and significantly reduced their expectations of when, how and how often staff should mark. Leaders have slimmed down the reporting process so that it is less burdensome, reduced the length of some meetings and provided planning time for departments to work on curricular matters. Staff who spoke with us reported that they feel proud to be members of staff and that they feel respected and valued. One staff member's comment was typical of many when they said, 'there is a real sense that we're all in this together.'

At no point during the inspection did we meet with arrogance or complacency on the part of staff or pupils. Instead, everyone feels grateful to have the opportunities presented to them by working or studying at the school. Pupils and staff talked warmly and loyally about the happy school atmosphere and the supportive nature of others.

The school has not rested on its laurels since the previous inspection in 2007 and leaders have continually tried to improve their work. This is particularly notable since your appointment and is evident in the work staff have undertaken to develop

the curriculum. Your continual drive to do the best you can is shared by other leaders and staff. 'Best' is not simply defined in academic terms. Your integrity is evident in efforts to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend the school. Consequently, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils entering the school in Year 7 has risen from 4% four years ago to 10% now.

Trustees are committed and knowledgeable. They understand the school, the needs of its pupils and the priorities for further development well. Trustees are familiar with current educational issues and help the school to navigate them successfully. They, too, share leaders' commitment to excellence and provide effective support and challenge to ensure that effective accountability is in place.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Of the parents who responded to the Parent View survey, 98% would recommend the school.

Safeguarding is effective. The DSL and his team have confident oversight of their child protection responsibilities. Staff receive appropriate training according to their roles in school and receive regular updates about different aspects of child protection. Well-kept records ensure that training is comprehensive and up to date.

Staff are encouraged to be vigilant and alert to signs of pupils' vulnerability. They know the procedure to follow and who to speak to should they have concerns about a pupil. The DSL and his team monitor safeguarding cases closely and work effectively with external agencies to secure the support necessary for pupils. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are complete, up to date and comprehensive. Pupils who spoke with us said that they feel safe in school because of the open and supportive culture. They would willingly speak to staff if they had concerns.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith

Ofsted Inspector