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Mr David Charlton
Headteacher
Weaverham High School
Lime Avenue
Weaverham
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Dear Mr Charlton

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Weaverham High School

Following my visit with Dawn Platt, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring 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 was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, a governor, senior leaders and staff who hold responsibility for various aspects of the school's work to support the achievement and well-being of disadvantaged students. An inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed parts of several lessons, most jointly with senior leaders, focusing on the learning of disadvantaged students. They met with groups of students in Key Stages 3 and 4 and looked at their mathematics and English books. Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to the achievement of disadvantaged students and the school's actions to improve it, including development plans, self-evaluation, analyses of achievement data, information about intervention strategies and their impact, attendance records and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding procedures.

Context

Weaverham High School is a popular 11 to 16 secondary school with just over 1,000 students. In most year groups, boys outnumber girls, most markedly in Year 11. Nearly 20% of the students currently on roll are eligible for support through the

pupil premium (additional government funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals or in care of the local authority). This percentage is below the national average but reflects a rise since the previous whole-school inspection in February 2011. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs has also increased over the last five years and is broadly average. Fewer students than is typical nationally join or leave the school partway through their education.

The governing body has recently been reconstituted. The headteacher is a local leader of education and supports two other schools. A deputy headteacher who was appointed just over a year ago leads the school's work to support the achievement and well-being of disadvantaged students.

Findings of the monitoring inspection

Students join the school having attained higher-than-average standards in the national Key Stage 2 tests, although by a smaller margin in the younger year groups currently in the school. The performance of the disadvantaged students in these tests spans the full attainment range but is lower overall than that of their peers. However, the academic make-up of this group of students varies from one year to another and no consistent upward or downward trends in their achievement are evident. In particular, the improvement seen at GCSE in 2013 was not sustained in 2014. Indeed, the gaps between the achievement of the disadvantaged students and their peers were at their widest in 2014 when only 33% of them gained five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics in comparison with 69% of their peers. Gaps were similarly wide in English and mathematics GCSEs, although standards in mathematics fell across the whole Year 11 cohort in 2014.

While the school has a track record of strong progress for its more-advantaged students, the progress of its disadvantaged students is markedly weaker, particularly those who join the school with average Key Stage 2 results. However, the picture is more positive for students currently in the school. The school's data suggest that the gaps in attainment and progress will start to narrow this summer for Year 11, although still remain significant, but are smaller in Year 10 and Key Stage 3. Leaders analyse assessment data thoroughly but reported comparisons with national data tend to focus on whole groups rather than considering progress from students' different starting points.

Senior leaders are well aware that the outcomes for disadvantaged students have not been good enough and have introduced a number of interventions to tackle this. Just over a year ago, led by a newly appointed deputy headteacher, work to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students saw a sea change in approach. Under the umbrella of 'Access and Achievement', work of previously separate teams has been integrated into one coherent approach. Positive impact is evident, although senior leaders know that more embedding and development is still required. This bigger team of staff includes the special educational needs coordinator, the inclusion manager, achievement coordinators, the family support worker and learning mentors. The local authority views this work as good practice; the deputy headteacher has led sessions on the school's approach within the local authority.

The importance of this area of the school's work is reflected in the awareness shown by staff and the introduction this year of a performance management objective for each teacher that relates to provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students. These objectives vary in their nature and include achievement of students within a particular class, engaging teaching approaches and curriculum development, but not all are defined clearly enough to support assessment of their impact. Lesson observation records seen do not capture the learning of these students. Leaders have used work scrutiny to look at the progress of disadvantaged students but their day-to-day learning has not been a focus of lesson observations or learning walks.

Systems for tracking the progress of all students, and key groups, are good. This year, the number of reviews has been increased in Key Stage 3. Data are analysed thoroughly with every student considered. The system places, rightly, responsibility on individual teachers to identify strategies for supporting underachieving students in their classes. While some disadvantaged students benefited from support from additional adults in the observed lessons, teachers did not appear to provide any bespoke support for individual students above that provided more generally for all students. An exploration of the day-to-day learning of these students has the potential to help teachers promote their better learning and progress over time.

The suite of intervention strategies is carefully considered, informed by leaders' understanding of the school's context and its students and by research, such as from the Sutton Trust Education Endowment Foundation. The strategies are well managed and responsive to the needs of different cohorts of students in each year group and to individual students' changing needs as their progress improves or slips. As well as one-to-one and small-group interventions to support mathematics and English, disadvantaged students benefit from pastoral and/or academic support tailored to their individual circumstances and needs, during and beyond the school day. Students who are looked after by the local authority have bespoke plans. Close collaboration between staff ensures disadvantaged students who have special educational needs are identified early. In the past, the transition from Key Stage 3 to 4 was not successful for some disadvantaged students and those who had special educational needs. Teachers from the English and mathematics departments now work alongside the special educational needs staff. Low-attaining students benefit from literacy and numeracy programmes.

Other strategies reflect a good combination of the practical and the aspirational. The re-vamped 'Home and Dry Club' supports disadvantaged students with after-school learning and homework. An increased number of students are participating in extra-curricular activities and visits, for instance to universities, and taster days at colleges.

The quality of information, advice and guidance at each transition point (ages 11, 14 and 16) is good. Liaison with partner primary schools is followed by a summer school for disadvantaged students with a celebration event for parents. Career education is mapped carefully across the curriculum and impartial, independent advice provided to each disadvantaged Year 11 student. All Year 9 students attended a career event at the school prior to selecting their Key Stage 4 subject options. The school is working towards external accreditation for its work in information, advice and guidance.

The attendance of disadvantaged students is improving but remains a concern. There is scope to link this aspect of the school's work more closely to the drive to improve outcomes and the work of the Access and Achievement Team and ensure it has a higher profile, including striving to increase parental involvement further. Rates of persistent absence of disadvantaged students have been high but are reducing, as are fixed-term exclusions. Checks are carried out on the attendance and progress of students who attend college or work-experience placements. Safeguarding procedures are good.

The governing body, recently reconstituted, has nominated a governor to lead on improving outcomes for disadvantaged students. This is a good development. The governor, who is a knowledgeable senior leader in post-16 education, is an expert in interpreting data. He has encouraged leaders to supplement their very detailed documentation of impact of the various strategies for individual students with a more succinct overview of how successful interventions have been in order that strategic decisions can be made. Minutes of governors' meetings reflect appropriate challenge for leaders. For instance, governors were instrumental in the development plan's focus on 'closing the gaps'.

External support

The headteacher has commissioned an external review of the school's use of pupil premium which is due to take place soon. Previously, leaders have made use of an external consultant to audit the school's work in this area, as well as receiving a visit from an improvement officer from the local authority. The school is seeking to be involved in projects to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students.

The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged students effectively to achieve their potential are:

- strong leadership that has developed the integrated approach of the Access and Achievement Team, which has brought drive and coherence to improving outcomes for disadvantaged students
- the suite of interventions and other strategies which are well tailored and responsive to students' academic and pastoral needs, and close tracking of impact on each student's achievement
- effective careers education and independent information, advice and guidance at each transition point (ages 11, 14 and 16).

The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- improvement in attendance is not rapid enough for some disadvantaged students and work to promote it is not as high profile or intensive as other aspects
- the relatively small degree to which parents are involved, although the new intake Year 7 summer school has brought some success, and the limited use of student voice to contribute to further improvement

- the lack of sharpness in evaluation and development planning impedes clear identification of impact or areas for further improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Monitor the day-to-day learning of disadvantaged students and act on the findings in order to bring improvement. Incorporate students' views, including how students learn best in lessons and from teachers' feedback.
- Sharpen success criteria in development plans and ensure that evaluation draws out key messages about what is and what is not working well to inform future actions and strategic decisions.
- Step up efforts to increase the attendance of disadvantaged students, raising the profile of this work.
- Reinvigorate strategies for involving parents and carers of disadvantaged students, including reviewing the effectiveness of well-established routines, such as arrangements for parents' evenings.
- Build on recent developments to improve achievement in mathematics, ensuring students understand, can reason and problem solve as well as become proficient in methods and recall of knowledge.

I am copying this letter to the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector