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30 November 2015

Mr Andrew Shaw
Executive principal
Leek High Specialist Technology School
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Dear Mr Shaw

Short inspection of Leek High School

Following my visit to the school with Her Majesty's Inspector, Gwen Coates, on 3 November 2015 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Following your very recent appointments in September, you and the newly appointed associate headteacher have very quickly secured a culture of high aspirations amongst pupils and staff. This has maintained the drive to improve the school further that was started by previous leaders. You are well aware of the reasons why the school is not yet outstanding and you are using your experience as a national leader of education to further improve the good quality of education in the school that has been maintained since the last inspection. Areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report have either been successfully addressed or are currently being tackled. The quality of teaching, marking and feedback show improvement and pupils' achievement is higher.

Pupils' achievements at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 show a significant and rapid improvement compared with those seen in 2014. Pupils make strong progress across virtually all subjects, but particularly in English and mathematics. This improving trend is set to continue because the very effective leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is making sure all pupils benefit from good teaching, which helps them to learn well. Leaders are well supported by the local authority's school improvement partner. Standards are also improving in the sixth form, particularly in work-related or vocational courses where pupils make good progress. All pupils in

recent years have been successful in gaining a place to further their education or in securing a place in employment or training.

Leaders have ensured, through effective professional development, that teachers fully understand the link between the quality of teaching over time and pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are committed to enabling all pupils to make the progress they should, given their starting points. Teachers plan challenging activities and pupils readily take on these challenges because they want to succeed.

The impact of the work of leaders and teachers to improve teaching, learning and assessment is seen in the good progress made by disadvantaged pupils and by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. These groups are exceptionally well supported in their learning. Leaders have successfully removed many of the barriers to learning that these groups of pupils face, which is allowing them to make as much progress as other pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils in the school are now making better progress than other pupils nationally, especially in English.

Pupils demonstrate good conduct around the school and willingly talk about their work to each other, to their teachers and to visitors. The school shares some of its facilities with the adjoining special school, The Meadows School. Leaders have developed a fully inclusive, supportive and caring atmosphere and pupils from The Meadows School confidently walk along the corridors in this school and are warmly greeted by teachers.

The combination of good teaching and high-quality care, guidance and support is leading to improving attendance and a reduction in the number of pupils who are frequently absent.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and staff take seriously their responsibility to ensure that pupils are safe and are well looked after on the school site. The personal, social and health education course covers a range of different themes which includes informing pupils how to keep themselves safe from the threats of extremist views and radicalisation, 'sexting' and e-safety.

'Room 21' continues to be used to good effect to provide support for the most vulnerable pupils and their families. Pupils self-refer when they need help and receive a wide range of support, often delivered by external agencies, including help with emotional health and well-being.

Inspection findings

- Pupils start in Year 9 with standards that, for many, are below those expected for their age, based on teachers' assessments in their previous school. By the

end of Year 11 about half are successful in obtaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics, which is similar to the national average.

- About three quarters of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 made at least the progress they should and more than a third made much better progress as a result of consistently good teaching in English and mathematics.
- Sixth-form learners benefit from being able to choose academic and vocational courses to meet their interests from the wide variety offered and taught across the Leek Federation of schools. Sixth-form learners are attentive and interested in their studies. Teachers' highly effective questioning encourages them to become more confident in discussing their ideas and thinking hard about complex issues.
- Teachers are benefiting from opportunities to improve their teaching in what you call a 'speed-dating' activity, where teachers readily share ideas on good practice with each other. This is helping to make sure all pupils benefit from the excellent practice evident in some subjects and is encouraging all teachers to try new approaches to improve their own practice.
- Teachers use the school's small number of teaching assistants very effectively in lessons. The way you have attached them to particular subject areas makes it easier for them to be involved with teachers in planning work for particular pupils or groups.
- Teachers consistently follow the school's policy on correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar in marking pupils' work. Teachers' marking indicates clearly to pupils how they can improve their work. Pupils enthusiastically 'have a go' at the challenges teachers set in their feedback comments because they want to show teachers what they are capable of achieving.
- Leaders, with the support of the local authority's school improvement partner, have taken steps to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments in different subjects, including using external moderation by other schools and examining boards. However, internal and external moderation of assessment is not yet carried out as rigorously in every subject as it is in the highest-performing subjects. Where it is used very well, such as in English, teachers use their reliable and accurate assessments to make sure pupils are taught work at the right level. This was instrumental in the rapid and significant improvement in pupils' outcomes in English at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015.
- Pupils have the opportunity to study two different foreign languages, which is a reduction from the four that were previously available. Many pupils begin learning languages in Year 9 with little background because they have not studied a language in sufficient depth in Years 7 and 8 in their previous schools. You have correctly identified this as the key reason why some pupils make much slower progress in languages than they should. You now have plans to improve learning in this area by working with the feeder schools to ensure a more continuous curriculum provision for languages from Year 7 through to Year 11.
- Strategies to improve behaviour are working and this is evident from your records of incidents of poor behaviour, where pupils rarely repeat their poor behaviour.

- You and the associate headteacher have higher expectations of the standards of behaviour pupils should demonstrate and are intent on ensuring that these are fully understood by pupils and their parents. These raised expectations mean that, understandably, there has been some increase in the number of incidents recorded in this term.
- Although leaders know about the difference their work is making to improving overall attendance, reducing exclusions and improving behaviour, less is known about how this work is bringing about improvements for groups of pupils such as girls, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and the sixth form. This information is not yet linked strongly enough to improving outcomes for these groups of pupils.
- The 16 to 19 study programme is effective because standards in the sixth form are rising. However, the strategic leadership of the sixth form is not yet as strong as that of the main school. For example, leaders do not make use of information on GCSE re-sit examinations to check the effectiveness of this programme as sharply as they could. They also do not ensure that all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programme, such as access to work experience, are as comprehensive as they might be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- refinements are made to the way in which information is used so that more is known about the attendance, behaviour and exclusions of groups of pupils, including girls, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
- all subject leaders follow the rigorous internal and external checking of assessment information that is seen in the strongest subject areas
- the strategic leadership of the sixth form is enhanced by the adoption of the same rigorous systems in place to monitor, support and improve performance in the main school.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met you and other senior leaders, the newly appointed Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority's school improvement partner. Pupils gave inspectors their views on the school when they spoke to us in lessons and around the school site at break and lunchtime. We joined you, the associate headteacher and the senior leader with responsibility for improving teaching,

learning and assessment, in short visits to lessons where we spoke with pupils about their work and looked at their work in books, on computers and during practical activities. The views of parents were considered through the 33 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information on pupils' progress and scrutinised other records about keeping pupils safe, their attendance and punctuality, and their behaviour.