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17 March 2016

Mr Mike Cladingbowl  
Executive Principal  
Knutsford Academy  
Bexton Road  
Knutsford  
Cheshire  
WA16 0EA

Dear Mr Cladingbowl

### **Short inspection of Knutsford Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 2016 with Liz Kelly, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Most of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection have been tackled effectively.

You are highly ambitious for the school and have communicated this effectively to staff, parents and pupils. Staff who completed the questionnaire indicated they are fully aware of the goals that the school is trying to achieve. Staff and pupils comment that the school has improved significantly in recent months. For example, one member of staff wrote that 'the "back to basics" approach of the last 12 months has had an enormous impact on the learning of pupils'. Another wrote that it 'feels like a school that is going places'. Parents hold similarly positive views: for example, over 90% of the 86 respondents to the Ofsted online questionnaire believe that their children make good progress and are well looked after.

You and other leaders have an accurate view of where the school's strengths lie and where it needs to improve in order to be outstanding. Leaders have successfully addressed a number of areas where, in recent years, outcomes for pupils and learners were less strong. For example, following a period when attendance was below average, staff gave a much higher priority to encouraging good attendance. This has resulted in a marked improvement for the current academic year, where overall attendance has risen to above average and fewer pupils have been persistently absent. Similarly, an additional focus on the achievement of boys has led

to more boys making the progress expected of them; as a result, the gaps between boys' and girls' achievement have narrowed considerably.

Leaders with responsibility for individual subject areas are taking a more active role in rigorously monitoring the provision and outcomes in their areas. They feel more accountable than in the past. You have ensured that teachers concentrate on 'doing the basics well'. The quality of teaching is underpinned by a revised curriculum that provides more challenging work throughout the school. The additional teaching time given for pupils to learn English and mathematics demonstrates leaders' commitment to improving outcomes further in these key subjects. These changes are beginning to have a positive impact.

Recent changes have helped to raise standards in the sixth form. After results dropped in 2014, leaders revised the subjects on offer and gave greater weight to ensuring that learners were studying appropriate courses. Improvements in 2015 were particularly evident at AS level, when learners' achievement compared very favourably with that of similar learners nationally.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. The school used the expertise of local authority officers to help review safeguarding procedures and leaders believe this has helped to improve practice. Pupils say that they feel safe and that there is someone they can turn to if they have a problem. A very high proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire say that their children are safe and happy in the school.

Regular lessons help pupils to develop their understanding of how to stay safe and protect themselves from risks.

### **Inspection findings**

- Governors have overseen a period of significant change in the management of the school and its position as part of the Knutsford Multi-Academy Trust. Through undertaking an audit of skills, they identified what additional expertise they needed and have extended membership of the governing body accordingly.
- From their starting points, the proportions of pupils making the expected progress in English and in mathematics in 2015 were broadly similar to, or above, national figures. The same was true for the proportions exceeding expected progress.
- Pupils make progress that at least matches that of similar pupils nationally in all subject areas. Pupils achieve particularly well in science, religious studies and dance. The school's monitoring records show that current pupils' progress exceeds that of pupils who have recently left and that GCSE results are set to rise in 2016, particularly in English.

- The school has a good record of raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, although some gaps remain. Recently, the school's success in narrowing the achievement gap in English between disadvantaged pupils and others received national recognition.
- An above-average proportion of learners who start the sixth form complete their courses successfully. In 2015, learners on academic courses made better progress than those on vocational courses.
- Teachers form strong relationships with their students and successfully promote positive attitudes to learning. They have good subject knowledge, which helps them to explain clearly and to anticipate where pupils are most likely to develop misunderstandings. Teachers use assessment frequently and accurately to promote pupils' learning.
- Staff and pupils say that behaviour in lessons and around the school is typically good or better. What we saw during the inspection supports this view.
- Pupils understand how different forms of bullying can cause young people to be unhappy. They say that bullying is rare, and are supported in this view by the large majority of parents. Pupils are ready to accept differences between people and demonstrate this in their behaviour.
- Pupils feel well guided in their option choices going into Key Stage 4. Similarly, in the sixth form, current learners say that they had all the information they needed to choose their subjects and to make informed decisions about university courses or other options available after leaving.
- Learners in the sixth form take advantage of the many opportunities to contribute to the school as a whole and take responsibility, for example as prefects or peer mentors. In addition to their main subject choices, all learners undertake work experience and build their understanding of healthy living and personal welfare.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in pupils' outcomes are consolidated and extended by continuing to monitor the effectiveness of recent changes to teaching and the curriculum and taking further action where necessary.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, inspectors held meetings with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed teaching across the school, including observations made jointly with a member of the school's middle leadership team. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work and scrutinised pupils' written work. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, including the school's data about pupils' achievement and their behaviour and safety. Inspectors took account of 86 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 79 that contained supporting comments. They also took account of 49 responses to the staff questionnaire.