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5 April 2016

Mr David Charlton
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Dear Mr Charlton

Short inspection of Weaverham High School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2016 with Mary Myatt HMI, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your resolute and humane leadership is valued by all within the school community. In the online inspection survey, one parent commented on your commitment to 'providing a first class learning environment for all'. This drive has led to improving outcomes for pupils each year since the last inspection.

Along with senior leaders and governors, you take thoughtful and decisive action to bring about required improvements. You responded swiftly and effectively to tackle the areas for improvement in English identified at the previous inspection. Strong leadership in this department now ensures that pupils' progress and attainment are significantly above national averages. When pupils' achievement in mathematics dipped in 2014, you acted decisively, resulting in much stronger outcomes in 2015.

Over recent years you have ensured that senior leaders and governors are focused first and foremost on the progress of individual pupils. Consequently, in 2015, regardless of their prior attainment, the proportions of pupils making and exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics were above national averages.

A monitoring inspection focusing on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils took place in May 2015. Senior leaders wasted no time acting on the priorities for further improvement identified during this inspection. Monitoring the day-to-day learning of

disadvantaged pupils is the top priority for senior leaders and the impact of the school's actions can be seen in the narrowing achievement gaps between these pupils and other pupils nationally.

While justifiably proud of your successes so far, you and your senior leadership team are acutely aware of the areas where there is further work to be done. Knowing that poor attendance is a major barrier to pupils making good progress, staff are working hard to reduce the number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs who are regularly absent from school. The same efforts are being made to reduce the number of these pupils who receive fixed-term exclusions.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders are committed to safeguarding the young people in their care. Leadership of this area is very strong. Procedures to ensure that all staff receive relevant training are robust, as are protocols and practices for record keeping. Safeguarding arrangements in school are enhanced by the close working relationship leaders have with relevant staff at the local authority. Systems to check the suitability of staff to work with children are strong.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes for pupils have improved over recent years. In 2015, overall attainment and progress figures were significantly above national averages. The school has a good track record of making accurate predictions of pupils' outcomes and the projections for 2016 indicate that a trajectory of improvement is set to continue.
- Attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers narrowed in 2015. However, disadvantaged pupils of middle ability did not make good progress in mathematics. Senior leaders have responded to this and projections for 2016 indicate that this cohort of pupils are set to progress at the same rate as their peers nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress throughout their time in school. The special educational needs coordinator monitors and analyses their progress well. She has restructured the way teaching assistants work to enable them to support pupils more effectively. Parents value this support, and the feedback that they receive about how their children are getting on in school.
- Responses to the online parent survey are overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority saying that their children feel happy and safe and are thriving at the school. Many of the comments reflect how much they value the help and support their children receive from staff. They find the headteacher particularly approachable and praise his leadership qualities. Parents of pupils in Year 7 feel that their children have benefited from high-quality arrangements for the transition from primary school.
- Both parents and pupils speak very highly of the extensive enrichment opportunities which are available. Senior leaders monitor which pupils attend these extra-curricular activities. A key part of the job description of

the newly appointed Pupil Premium Champion is to increase the number of disadvantaged pupils who engage in these opportunities.

- Procedures for managing teachers' performance are rigorous, and used effectively to drive up standards in teaching and further improve outcomes for pupils. All teachers now have a specific target related to the achievement of their disadvantaged pupils. Appropriate programmes of support and development are in place for the very small number of cases where teaching is not good enough.
- Senior leaders have introduced a clear policy for marking and feedback that celebrates what pupils can do well and provides targets for further improvement. It is clear from pupils' books that they are acting upon the advice given, which is helping them to improve the quality of their work.
- Pupils behave in a calm, mature and friendly manner. Those spoken to during the inspection reported that their learning is rarely disrupted by the poor behaviour of others. They also described how much they value the support they receive from staff in school. Pupils look very smart in their uniforms and wear them with pride.
- Senior leaders are keen to ensure that transgender, as well as lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils feel safe and happy in school. They offer practical support and guidance to all these pupils, seeking advice from external agencies to ensure that this is appropriate and effective. However, although senior leaders encourage respect for sexual diversity, pupils spoken to during the inspection say that occasionally the use of the word 'gay' in a derogatory manner still occurs.
- For the last three years, overall absence figures have been lower than national averages. However, behind these positive headline figures there is concern about the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs, particularly the number who are persistently absent. The actions that leaders have taken to improve the attendance of these pupils have not had enough impact. While there has been some improvement in the overall attendance of pupils who have special educational needs, senior leaders are acutely aware that too many disadvantaged pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, are still not attending school regularly. A newly created post of Pupil Premium Champion will focus primarily on improving the attendance of these pupils.
- For the last three years, fixed-term exclusion rates have been below national averages. However, senior leaders know that, as with the absence figures, behind their pleasure at the positive headlines is a concern that too many disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs are receiving fixed-term exclusions. A range of actions, for example the introduction of pastoral support managers for each year group, has had some impact in this area. The figures to date show that fewer of these pupils are now being excluded but leaders consider it a high priority to reduce this number even further.
- Staff are working hard with individual pupils and their families to tackle concerns about attendance and fixed-term exclusions. However, stronger strategic leadership of this area is required, to systematically monitor and evaluate the impact of these actions.
- The governance of the school is strong. Governors are reflective and

constantly examining their own practice to ensure that they carry out their role effectively. To this end, the governing body re-constituted itself in April 2015 to become a smaller group. Members of this new group possess the required skills and expertise to both support and challenge leaders effectively. At the heart of the governing body sits the pupil progress and learning committee. This closely monitors and evaluates the impact of actions that leaders are taking to improve outcomes for all pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs who are persistently absent is reduced further
- the number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs who are excluded for a fixed term is reduced further
- the strategic leadership of pupils' behaviour and attendance is strengthened.

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 West and Chester Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met with you and other senior leaders and eight governors. We also spoke to the special educational needs coordinator and staff with responsibility for pupils that attend alternative provision. Accompanied by senior leaders, we visited lessons to observe learning and to look at pupils' work. We met with two groups of pupils and spoke to others in lessons and around school. We looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' attainment and progress and information about attendance and behaviour. We considered the views and comments of over 100 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View).