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Mrs Julia Polley
Headteacher
The Wensleydale School & Sixth Form
Richmond Road
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North Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Polley

Short inspection of The Wensleydale School & Sixth Form

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017 with Debbie Redshaw, Her Majesty's 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a result of the decisive, targeted action that you have taken since taking up your appointment in January 2016.

During the inspection, inspectors focused on the attendance and progress of pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. Your robust, honest and open self-evaluation completed with governors, the local authority and your leadership team has enabled leaders to develop and implement clear action plans focused on pupils' attendance and progress. This work is leading to improved attendance particularly for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, you recognise that a closer analysis and evaluation of pupils' attendance and progress is needed to further develop improvement strategies for disadvantaged pupils.

You, your governors and senior leaders have high expectations of both your staff and pupils. Collectively, you are uncompromising in your standards and work to ensure that you meet the needs of individual pupils. It is clear that you know your pupils well and this enables a more personalised approach to pupils' academic and social development. All members of the school community acknowledge the positive impact this has on progress and welfare.

At the last inspection, the headteacher was asked to ensure that staff take full account of the varying learning needs of all pupils in lessons. Inspectors found that teachers are using pupil information more effectively. Most teachers take account of pupils' individual needs and plan to ensure that these needs are met. However, some pupils are overly reliant on direction from the teacher and do not demonstrate the ability to work independently, actively seek to improve or take responsibility for their own progress.

The work that you have undertaken to carefully link performance management and professional development is improving the quality of learning in most classrooms. Teachers value the continuing professional development that they access. Your monitoring procedures of teaching enable you to identify and share good practice, which further improves the learning experience for pupils. Teachers use time in lessons productively and they use questioning skilfully to develop pupils' responses and deepen learning. Your pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are developing the ability to learn from their mistakes. Teaching has the most impact on disadvantaged pupils when there is a clear focus on their progress through subtle yet effective techniques. Teachers are embracing your new strategies to promote effective study skills and habits so that pupils can take responsibility for their own learning and are more readily able to learn from their mistakes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has highly effective policies and procedures in place to ensure that pupils are safe. Your child protection records are extremely thorough and are followed up appropriately and astutely. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training on key safeguarding issues including online safety and the appropriate use of social media. Furthermore, school leaders set clear school rules that promote a safe and respectful culture in which pupils' welfare is paramount. Teachers use registration time effectively to promote this culture of safety and to inform pupils how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are safe and feel safe.

Inspection findings

- You, your staff and governors are not complacent. You reviewed the school's position with honesty and insight and, as a result, you have a thorough, incisive and robust vision for continuing improvement.
- Performance management is rigorous and links with opportunities for staff professional development, which is proving effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- You have reviewed strategies for using your pupil premium funding effectively and have put in place clear, focused strategies to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the same opportunities as their peers. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that you are maintaining the good standard of education provided and that teachers have high and equal expectations of all groups of pupils.

- At the last inspection, school leaders were asked to ensure that staff take full account of the varying learning needs of all pupils in lessons. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator is working closely with all members of staff to empower them to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- You rightly identified attendance as a key barrier to learning and have recently put in place new strategies to address this. This includes the appointment of a new attendance officer. This work is beginning to have a positive impact upon attendance at school, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, these pupils are making better progress.
- You have established clear lines of accountability across the school. Senior leaders challenge and support middle leaders, but middle leaders do not yet take the initiative in driving forward departmental development. They mainly rely on the direction of senior leaders.
- Strong leadership in the sixth form has contributed to a restructured study programme. As a result, students are making good progress in most subjects. Sixth form attendance is very good and students talk very positively about their experiences at school including the support that they receive. Students receive good-quality careers information, advice and guidance which prepares them well for their next steps.
- In lessons, sixth form students show considerable maturity and engage confidently in high-level discussion and debate. Teachers support them well in their learning and homework is used to support their progress. They benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The proposed partnership with another provider has been positively received by current Year 11 pupils who are keen to continue their studies at this school, as well as benefit from the additional courses on offer with the proposed provider.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they rigorously analyse, evaluate and further develop strategies to improve the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- they further develop pupils as independent learners so that they actively seek to improve and take greater responsibility for their own progress
- middle leaders continue to develop so they become the driving force for improvement in their subject areas and less reliant on specific direction from the leadership team.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Murray
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders, middle leaders and governors. Inspectors met formally with two groups of pupils and informally with pupils at break and lunchtime. Inspectors visited lessons alongside senior leaders to see the impact of recent changes on the progress of pupils. An inspector met with a group of governors and a representative from the local authority who acts as the school's improvement partner. Documentation was scrutinised including: minutes from governors' meetings, headteacher's reports, information about pupils' progress, documents about teaching and learning, details of attendance and exclusions and information about safeguarding. Inspectors also viewed the 61 parent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, 80 pupil questionnaires and 27 staff questionnaires.