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17 March 2017

Mr Richard Brown
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Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of The Urswick School – A Church of England Secondary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 2017 with Johanna Davey, 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2013. The school had a no formal designation monitoring inspection in December 2015 which focused on behaviour.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the inspection in 2013. You have successfully addressed the areas identified. This is evident in the GCSE results in 2014 and also in 2015, when pupils' overall progress in their 'best 8' subjects was significantly above the national average. In 2016, pupils' progress in subjects such as science and modern foreign languages was above the national average, in languages significantly so. Pupils who have low prior attainment typically make progress above national averages, including in English and mathematics.

However, you were disappointed with the results in mathematics. You have taken the right actions to secure improvement. Your new leadership appointments in mathematics from September 2016 have much improved the quality of teaching.

Pupils come from primary school with prior attainment that is significantly below the national average. To improve outcomes in mathematics and ensure that pupils are confident in their use of numeracy, you decided that the curriculum at key stage 3 will include numeracy lessons for specific pupils. Pupils, during a numeracy lesson, told the inspector that they found their numeracy lessons helpful. Your assessment information, for example in Year 7, is showing that pupils are making at least good progress in mathematics.

There were 77 replies to the Ofsted staff survey. Staff are overwhelmingly proud to work at the school and 90% of staff strongly agreed or agreed that they feel well supported in working at the school. Staff who spoke to inspectors informally during the inspection also confirmed these views. Your school surveys show that the vast majority of parents are happy with the work of the school. For example, your survey of 88 parents and carers of Year 10 pupils at the beginning of this year showed that 91% of those parents strongly agreed or agreed that the school was well led and managed. However, there are a small number of parents, including some of the 10 who replied to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, who are dissatisfied with some aspects of the school's work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the risks facing pupils in the local area, including gang violence. Leaders can demonstrate the wide-ranging work that they undertake to ensure that pupils are safe, including training staff on recognising the signs that pupils may be at risk from gang exploitation or radicalisation. Staff know whom they should refer concerns to, and leaders follow up concerns quickly. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Checks that adults are suitable to work with children meet statutory requirements. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that the safeguarding policy fully reflects how pupils are kept safe in line with the latest statutory guidance, for example by detailing the school's approach to sexting.

The pupils who spoke to inspectors, informally and formally, were all clear in their message that they felt safe at school. Some pupils stated that they felt safer inside school than outside of it. Areas around the school are well supervised and pupils stated that this was typical. The vast majority of parents strongly agreed or agreed that their child is safe and well cared for at the school.

Pupils get on well with each other. Differences are celebrated. Posters and activities relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender month were clearly visible around the school. In the words of one pupil: 'This school prepares you for life, not just for school.' Another commented that pupils are taught to have 'compassion, tolerance and respect'. The personal, social, health and economic education programme ensures that pupils, including students in the sixth form, are taught a variety of age-appropriate ways to stay safe. For example, they are given information on being healthy, sexting and drugs and alcohol misuse. Bullying is rare and, if it does occur, it is dealt with effectively. In the words of a pupil in Year 7: 'Bullying is not tolerated.'

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on what actions leaders are taking and what impact they are having in reducing fixed-term exclusions and improving attendance, particularly for pupils who have special educational support needs, and disadvantaged pupils. This is because exclusions in particular are well above the national average.
- Leaders have taken a tough stance on behaviour. As headteacher, you reinforce

high expectations and use fixed-term exclusions as a sanction for pupils breaking school rules. Pupils told inspectors that these high expectations helped them feel safe. In September 2016, in response to thefts of mobile phones in the local area as well as tensions between pupils through social media, you banned pupils from being able to bring mobile phones into school. As a result, pupils who breached this were excluded. This caused a rise in fixed-term exclusions.

- When leaders are worried about the well-being of any particular pupil, leaders use alternative provision rather than excluding the pupil from school. This is provision leaders know well and carefully monitor. You support pupils at risk of exclusion effectively through using 'walkabout' mentors, counselling and personalised support. Governors receive more detailed information on exclusions than they did previously. They are more aware of trends and patterns.
- Currently, overall exclusions are lower than in previous years, including for pupils who have additional needs, and who are disadvantaged. The staff who work to improve attendance are successful with their strategies. Attendance is higher than the national average. In the autumn term 2016, attendance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improved to just over 95%.
- We also agreed to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to improve outcomes in mathematics. This was because, in 2016, progress in mathematics, particularly for middle-ability disadvantaged pupils, was lower than the national average.
- You have added new leadership in mathematics. This is leading to improved teaching and consistency. Observations in mathematics during the inspection showed that teachers are confident in their subject knowledge; they explain concepts well and use a range of strategies to improve pupils' mental mathematics. Pupils believe that they can be successful in mathematics. Year 11 pupils have been given plenty of examination practice. Most-able pupils were working well together to successfully work out the answers to the hardest questions in the past papers. In other classes, all pupils were focused, working hard and responding well to their teacher.
- Leaders carefully monitor pupils and are quick to intervene when there is a risk of underachievement. Pupils appreciate the additional revision classes and support that they receive. Leaders work with an external provider to benchmark pupils' performance in mock examinations. As a result of effective teaching and intervention, the information from mock examinations, which is compared to other schools, shows that pupils are making more rapid progress in mathematics from their starting points.
- At key stage 3, pupils are enjoying mathematics and their numeracy lessons. Some pupils told the inspector that they felt that they could be moved on quicker to more challenging activities. From our joint observations, you agreed that there is more scope for teachers to challenge pupils in their learning, including more regular use of problem-solving questions to allow pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills. Overall, pupils' progress in mathematics, from their different starting points, is rapidly improving.
- We also evaluated the school's use of pupil premium funding. This was because, although the lower- and higher-ability disadvantaged pupils achieved above

average overall in the 2016 GCSE examinations, the middle-ability disadvantaged pupils did not. There were also some variations between subjects.

- Teachers are aware of pupils' needs and their different starting points. Observations showed a great deal of consistency in teaching practice. For example, in English, books of pupils in different year groups show pupils, including those who are disadvantaged middle-ability pupils, are writing confidently using technical language and responding well to teachers' high expectations.
- Leaders have a plan for spending the pupil premium funding. This is broken down into a number of strategies. However, the pupil premium statement for this year does not show the specific amounts allocated to different activities. Leaders are aware of the broad impact of their strategies, for example in the use of the library, music tuition and intervention classes. Leaders acknowledge that they could be more precise in their evaluation of the funding for different strategies and its impact on pupils' progress, particularly from their different starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve outcomes in mathematics through all teachers consistently challenging pupils in their learning, including problem solving at key stage 3
- evaluate more thoroughly the impact of pupil premium spending on pupils' progress across the school, reflecting their different starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors carried out the following activities during the inspection:

- meetings with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives from the governing body and a representative from the local authority
- visits to lessons with senior leaders, particularly in mathematics and English
- listening to a small group of pupils reading
- meeting groups of pupils, including students in the sixth form, to discuss the

school's approach to keeping pupils safe and ensuring equality of opportunity

- evaluation of information provided by the school, including safeguarding records, exclusion records, attendance information, the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress
- talking to pupils and staff informally throughout the school day
- taking into account the views of 10 responses to Parent View and 77 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.