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Dear Dr Williams

Short inspection of Cartmel Priory CofE School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2017 with Dawn Farrent, 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staffing has largely remained stable since the previous inspection. You have a committed, enthusiastic and talented team in place to continue to take the school forward.

You, your leadership team and the governors have worked hard to create a school where pupils achieve as best they can and leave the school with strong outcomes. Pupils appreciate the culture of high aspiration that pervades the school and thrive in the orderly and purposeful learning environment. The school regularly takes in pupils from other Cumbria schools, sometimes at the request of the local authority, and it is successful at integrating these pupils and addressing the different challenges they bring.

You provide strong and effective leadership. Staff and governors speak very warmly of how well you lead the school. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire or sent free-text responses were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and your leadership of it. Leaders at all levels follow your example and set challenging targets for staff and pupils. Pupils told me that staff often 'go the extra mile' to help them and they are really appreciative of the support they receive from leaders and teachers. Teachers and leaders know the pupils very well and the quality of pastoral care, guidance and support they offer to pupils is outstanding.

Pupils generally leave Cartmel Priory School well prepared for employment, education or training. The great majority achieve well. They receive good careers advice and guidance from the school's work-related learning coordinator, through lessons in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and through work experience and an annual careers fair.

Teaching is good and, as a result, pupils achieve good outcomes. Teachers generally have high expectations of pupils and drive them on to achieve the best possible grades they can. Pupils enjoy their learning and are ready and willing to learn. Teachers run a significant number of extra intervention programmes to boost pupils' achievement, which the pupils themselves appreciate. Your own records of teaching over time show that all teaching is typically at least good. However, some of these records lack rigour and a few highlight instances in lessons where teachers needed to do more to challenge the highest ability pupils. Inspectors also observed a few lessons on this inspection where teaching did not offer sufficient challenge to the most able learners.

You and your colleagues work well with other schools in the South Lakes Federation in order to share good practice and to offer teachers opportunities for professional development. Subject leaders often moderate their assessments with other schools, for instance.

You and other leaders have established an ethos in which every pupil is valued and respected. The school is a harmonious community where pupils get on well together. You have worked with pupils on establishing and embedding the school's core values, which include 'reaching further, aiming higher, working harder, thinking deeper and loving all'. Pupils know this mission statement and the great majority seek to live up to the values it promotes. Year 11 pupils told me that the school's everyday work to challenge and support them fully reflects these values.

Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school, and their attitudes to learning are overwhelmingly positive. Your pupils are well-mannered and take pride in their work. Younger pupils told inspectors that there is occasionally a little low-level disruption in some lessons and inspectors saw one example of this in a lesson observed.

You recognise that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities needs to improve. Over recent years, these groups of pupils have consistently had rates of persistent absence which were higher than national averages, including in 2016. Staff are working hard to address this problem and are having some success this year in improving the attendance of individual pupils.

Governors, senior leaders and staff have taken successful action to address most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. In 2013, inspectors identified the need to improve teaching so that students' progress would be at least consistently good. You and other leaders expect high standards of teachers and you use appraisal and coaching effectively to improve performance, with the result that

most pupils now make good progress from their starting points. You have also ensured that teachers insist on high standards of presentation in pupils' work.

You have accurately identified the next steps for the school to improve further. We agreed that further work is needed to ensure that all teachers set suitably challenging work for the most able pupils. We also agreed that the school will need to maintain its efforts to reduce the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Governors know the school and its strengths and weaknesses well. They hold leaders rigorously to account and ask challenging questions to assess the quality of provision. They link with subject departments and hold the subject leaders to account through school visits and a rota of meetings, where they scrutinise departmental performance. Governors manage finance effectively, including the pupil premium and the school's use of its funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Governors are experienced and committed and bring a wide range of skills to the governing body. They have placed strong emphasis on promoting beneficial links with the local community and parents.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the school has a strong culture of safeguarding and vigilance. Safeguarding procedures are thorough, robust and understood by all staff and governors. Your recruitment checks are sound and all safeguarding policies meet the statutory requirements. All staff receive up-to-date training and know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil. External agencies are used appropriately to support pupils and their families. Staff and governors have had training on 'Prevent', the government's programme for preventing radicalisation and extremism. Governors, too, have been trained in safeguarding matters and they take their responsibilities very seriously.

A very small number of parents and pupils who responded to Ofsted's questionnaires reported a concern about bullying. However, the great majority of pupils who spoke to inspectors said that bullying rarely occurs, but if it does, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. All pupils who spoke to inspectors feel that the school is very safe. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe on the internet and when using social media. The school has effective internet filtering procedures in place.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good progress. Performance overall in 2015 was strong. In 2016, the school's Progress 8 score, the new government measure by which secondary school achievement is judged, was significantly above national averages. Progress was also well above average in mathematics, science, humanities and in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Progress in English was above the national average and progress in modern foreign languages was broadly in line with national averages.

- Middle-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities mostly made very good progress overall and in a number of key subject areas in 2016. Disadvantaged pupils also made good progress overall, achieving better than their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Boys, too, made very good progress overall.
- The most able pupils generally performed in line with national averages for this group in 2016, although the performance of the most able boys was strong. However, most-able pupils made less progress than seen nationally in English, and in several other subjects the small group of high-ability girls made less progress than other pupils in the school and nationally. In most subjects in 2016, smaller percentages of pupils attained the highest grades at GCSE than nationally, and in English Language and the three separate sciences, attainment of the highest grades was significantly lower than the national average.
- The school's internal assessment information indicates that overall good progress made in 2016 is likely to be sustained in 2017. There are currently pockets of underachievement, involving small numbers of pupils, in a number of subjects in Years 8 to 10. Disadvantaged pupils and middle-ability pupils in Year 11 are currently achieving less well than they need to. Leaders are well aware of these patterns and have put in place suitable interventions to boost pupils' achievement. They are confident that the great majority of pupils will meet or exceed their targets by the end of this year. They demonstrated effectively to inspectors how they had raised achievement last year from similar positions.
- Mathematics and humanities are strengths of the school. Both subjects have consistently achieved very well in the last three years.
- Teaching is good overall and promotes pupils' good progress. Most teaching challenges pupils because teachers have high expectations of what they should achieve. Occasionally, however, levels of challenge are not high enough for the most able and teachers miss the opportunity to deepen pupils' thinking with extended questioning.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It offers pupils a range of appropriate courses, including a few vocational options. The school is doing good work to promote reading. The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and offers them a variety of extra-curricular activities. Leaders believe that their pupils benefit from a free choice of option subjects rather than being directed to enter the full English Baccalaureate compulsorily. They argue, with some justification, that this maintains pupils' motivation across the curriculum.
- Overall attendance is very close to the national average. However, attendance in current Year 9 is lower, and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with an education, health and care plan is too low currently.
- The school very rarely excludes pupils. It has not excluded any pupil permanently for several years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching always challenges the most able pupils at sufficiently high levels
- they continue to take all necessary steps to improve the attendance of key groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Hurren
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we held discussions with you and your senior colleagues, a group of subject leaders and, separately, a group of teachers. I met with members of the governing body. We met formally with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons.

We observed teaching and learning in a number of lessons across the curriculum, spoke to pupils and looked at the work in some of their books. We also looked at a sample of the work of high-ability pupils. We examined a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, attendance, a range of policies, the school's curriculum and assessment information. I scrutinised your self-evaluation and I undertook a review of the school's website.

As part of the inspection, I considered 54 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, 43 free-text responses from parents and 18 pupil responses to Ofsted's questionnaire.