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10 May 2017

Mr Christopher Hunt  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hunt

### **Short inspection of Culcheth High School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2017 with Jonathan Smart 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 April 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The leadership team 'run the school with an honest integrity which nurtures a high-trust environment where pupils and staff can flourish.' This is how a member of staff described leadership at this school. Inspection evidence supports this view.

You have evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the school with veracity based on secure and reliable evidence. These findings are aligned with the school development plan which is habitually evaluated and reviewed. Where improvements are not being made quickly enough, you take action that will secure sustainable improvements rather than 'quick wins'.

Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved and pupils' work shows that they continue to deepen their skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers are provided with a well thought out programme of ongoing training which has the teachers' standards at its core. Staff value this and pupils commented to inspectors that teaching is engaging. Nonetheless, your own evaluation indicates that teaching does not routinely promote high rates of progress for some pupils. There is no doubt that most pupils achieve well at this school but you readily accept that such variation among groups is what is preventing the school from being better than good.

Leaders' work to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has been impressive. The difference between the achievement of this group of pupils and their peers nationally has more than halved in one year. This massive impact is evidence of the capacity and tenacity of leaders. Current assessment information shows that this picture of improvement is replicated across year groups and subjects. We spoke about how this should serve as an impetus and motivator for you and your staff to make similar improvements to the progress of the most able pupils. The most able pupils reach very high standards but their starting points suggest that they are capable of achieving even better.

While the difference between the progress made by girls and boys has not been eradicated as identified in the last inspection, the difference is narrowing. You rightly recognise that the relentless drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning is what will have the greatest impact. This also applies to other groups of pupils, for example the very small number of lower-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is the area where you know the greatest improvements need to be made. Until recently, the dedicated pastoral care for these pupils came at the expense of their learning. These pupils are happy at school but can see that they are not making good progress. You spoke to me about the plans that you have secured to improve the provision for these pupils and you recognise that these plans need to be implemented with urgency.

Governors are dedicated to the work of the school and value all the work that you and the senior leaders do for the pupils. They have seen the improvements for themselves and recognise you and your senior leadership team as the fulcrum for these. Governors share your ambition and belief that this school can be even better and are supportive of you in your work. They bring with them sharp insight, appropriate challenge to leaders and a commitment to developing their own expertise.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that all policies and procedures are up to date and reflect recent developments in safeguarding. Pupils are given a wide and varied programme of support so that they know how to keep themselves safe in school and in the community. Staff undergo rigorous checks before they work at the school and all staff receive regular training and updates. Parents are kept well informed of how they can keep their children safe and the school website provides a range of resources specifically for parents. Where specific issues occur, leaders act swiftly, sensitively and scrupulously.

### **Inspection findings**

- Overall, pupils make similar progress to their peers nationally. However, certain groups of pupils do not achieve as well as they should, especially the most able

and least-able pupils. The standards that pupils reach across most subjects are high in comparison to the national averages but you know they could be even higher. We spoke about the need for teachers to adapt their teaching further so as to ensure that pupils realise their potential.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have, historically, not made good progress and their attendance has been low. Although the rates of attendance and progress are improving, you recognise that the provision for these pupils has not been effective. You have already made new appointments and drawn up secure plans to move provision on apace. As discussed, these plans need to be acted upon quickly.
- The curriculum had not been well designed for low-ability pupils. Consequently, this small group of pupils were following inappropriate courses. As soon as you became headteacher you reviewed the curriculum and you have ensured that all pupils follow suitable courses that will enable them to achieve and move on to the next stage of their education.
- You and your leaders are determined that pupils at key stage 3 have an enjoyable and challenging experience. Your work with local primary schools to design a continuous curriculum between key stage 2 and key stage 3 is exciting. You recognise that pupils arrive at your school with considerable knowledge and intellect and the curriculum is being developed so as to build upon these firm foundations.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching is further developed so that it better meets the needs of the most able and least-able pupils and so that they achieve as well as they should
- they implement the plans to improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors met with you and your senior leaders, four members of the governing body and your school improvement partner. Inspectors conducted a learning walk and had the opportunity to see pupils' work. We met with groups of pupils during the day and took account of 27 responses to the online pupil questionnaire. There

were 90 responses to 'Parent View', the online questionnaire for parents, and 83 free-text comments. There were 68 responses to the online staff questionnaire. We scrutinised a range of documentation relating to attendance and special educational needs provision. We also looked at assessment information, improvement planning, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.