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Mr Ian Dawson
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Dear Mr Dawson

Short inspection of The Thomas Cowley High School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2017 with Ofsted Inspector John Edwards, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection of the predecessor school. Your vision is to give students an equal chance, irrespective of their needs or circumstances, and that they should leave the school having made progress. The school is a warm and welcoming place. With the support of the governing body, you have developed a school that knows its pupils well. As a result, staff feel valued, pupils are increasingly confident and teaching is good.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to focus on improving teaching so that more pupils achieve higher grades. Since you became headteacher, there have been significant changes to the secondary curriculum and assessment systems. As a result, you have improved the quality of teaching and of pupils' behaviour. There has been a significant reduction in fixed-term and permanent exclusions and inspectors observed pupils conducting themselves with pride, self-control and maturity.

You place great importance on ensuring that the quality of teaching is at least good. Staff at all levels told me that they value the changes you have introduced, particularly the focus you place on developing their skills. The 'Web of Excellence' strategy is used across the academy and, as a result, the progress of pupils is improving rapidly. You rightly identified the need to develop teaching

further, particularly regarding feedback from staff to pupils.

You and your team have worked relentlessly to make the school a safe and inclusive place to learn. Your documentation shows you willingly take on many pupils from other schools, some of whom have complex needs. A parent of one pupil commented, 'The school has built my daughter's self-confidence and her academic abilities.' You agreed that while behaviour is good, the school must further improve attendance, and more rapidly, so as many pupils as possible enjoy the good teaching

You have trained leaders at all levels to make sure they insist on rapid improvements from their teams. The proportion of Year 11 disadvantaged pupils making the expected progress is much higher than in previous years. You have made rapid changes by insisting staff work with other local schools and a local university to widen their experience and enhance their skills. Together with the other inspector, we observed teachers using effective strategies to stretch the most able pupils in lessons and in pupils' work.

You are ably supported by an effective governing body, which shares your ambition for the academy, and by enthusiastic leaders. Both ensure that ideas, such as the reading and numeracy strategies, are routinely used by teachers to help prepare pupils for their next stage in life. However, you agree that some leaders at all levels need to check the effectiveness of their own work more regularly, to ensure that their work is helping pupils make even better progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding and the welfare of pupils is of utmost importance at The Thomas Cowley High School. All safeguarding arrangements are in place. You ensure that all the appropriate vetting checks take place before an adult works at the academy. Your records are well organised and detailed. You make referrals to the local authority if necessary and you work closely with parents and agencies to keep pupils safe. Staff and governors have received the most up-to-date training and speak knowledgably about issues relating to safeguarding pupils.

Pupils feel safe in school. They told us that bullying is rare and that they have a trusted adult to talk to if they have concerns. One pupil commented that 'The teachers all help you whenever you need it.' Parents feel their children are safe.

Inspection findings

- You have regular, effective meetings with senior staff to check on the work of leaders in charge of subjects. Staff agree these meetings are very helpful in improving teaching. For example, better teaching and support have narrowed the gap between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and others. You have identified that all leaders need to check their work even more regularly so they can be confident it is helping pupils improve.
- In 2016, results overall at GCSE were below the national averages,

particularly for those who are disadvantaged and the most able pupils. The school's internal assessment information shows that outcomes for this year will improve. For example, improved leadership of the current Year 11 has significantly improved attendance, so more pupils are supported effectively.

- You have been supported well by governors to make changes to staff roles in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders new to their roles are very passionate about supporting all pupils. The use of the pupil premium funding is now making a positive impact on provision for disadvantaged pupils and their progress is quickening.
- The choice of subjects for pupils to study is now well thought out. The provision for the most able pupils includes appropriate choices for GCSE science. You and inspectors looked at lessons and pupils' work, and we agreed that progress for these pupils is much improved.
- You have introduced a plan for improving pupils' literacy skills. Inspectors noted the confidence pupils showed in reading in a variety of lessons and with their reading partners. The school's own internal assessment information about younger pupils' reading skills shows good progress. Some groups of disadvantaged pupils are doing even better in their reading and are making outstanding progress.
- The strategy to develop the school's partnerships is effective. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities to learn from other schools, both here and abroad, and from a local university. You have used this to recruit effective teachers.
- During our tour of the school, we saw younger pupils discuss their understanding of wartime conditions with maturity and confidence. They were using their teacher's feedback in their books to help them. You rightly identified the need for all teachers to more consistently use the school's policy for teachers' feedback to pupils about their work, in order that more pupils can make progress.
- The school's success in improving pupils' behaviour has been notable. Pupils conduct themselves around the site and in lessons in a calm and friendly manner. Your team has successfully reduced fixed-term and permanent exclusions and pupils spoke very positively about their relationships with staff.
- You have made some improvements to pupils' attendance at the school. Your own tracking information shows that you accept a number of pupils, who have experienced difficulties, from other schools. Some of these pupils told inspectors how your staff have made a positive difference to their learning. However, you agreed that attendance is still not at the national average, and you have plans to improve it.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching improves further by ensuring that the school's policy for teachers to feedback to pupils in such a way that helps them to improve their work is consistently applied
- all subject leaders evaluate regularly and rigorously the effectiveness of their work to ensure that it is helping pupils make more rapid progress
- the strategies to improve attendance are further refined to make them even more effective.

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

Yours sincerely

Harkireet Sohel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, representatives of the governing body, subject leaders and a group of staff. Meetings were held with senior leaders with responsibility for attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, as well as those responsible for the curriculum and achievement. Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils. Inspectors considered 26 views of parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors also considered 27 responses to the inspection questionnaire for school staff. A range of documents and policies were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, plus information about pupils' performance.