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Mrs Elaine Kucharski
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Dear Mrs Kucharski

Short inspection of Newbridge Learning Community

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 2017 with Doris Bell OI, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have worked hard with your staff to create a caring culture in the school. Teachers greet pupils warmly as soon as they enter in the morning and, although one or two initially show reluctance to be in school, the vast majority respond well. Staff manage pupils' arrival effectively and conduct is good. This ensures that pupils have a positive start to the day.

We spoke with groups of parents and pupils during our visit. They are very proud of the school and appreciate all the work you and your staff do. Pupils are happy and feel very safe and parents are pleased with the progress their children make. Pupils and parents alike are highly complimentary about your leadership. Parents say that teachers know how to teach and how to keep pupils interested in their work. A typical comment was that school helps pupils to 'exceed expectations'.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. These concerned improving the quality of teaching and learning in science and mathematics, ensuring that leaders and managers held teachers more rigorously to account for the quality of their teaching and making sure that school leaders made better-focused use of pupil premium funding. However, you recognise that progress in mathematics, although improving, is still

not as good as it could be. I have written about these areas in greater detail below.

You manage the various transitions throughout your pupils' experience of school effectively, which contributes well to the good progress they make. You do this in a number of ways. For example, you have appointed a transition officer to ensure that pupils have as smooth a journey through their school life as possible. This person's job includes overseeing connections with schools who send pupils to Newbridge Learning Community, discussing learning options with pupils as they progress from key stage 3 to key stage 4 and working closely with colleges and post-16 providers as pupils move on to education, employment or training.

You and your senior leaders analyse well the performance of the school and decide on appropriate actions to bring about continuing improvement. For example, you recognise that attendance requires constant attention because of the experiences of many of your pupils before they arrive in the school. Consequently, this is now a regular feature of your action plan for improvement, as the characteristics of cohorts of pupils change year on year. You accept, however, that the criteria by which you evaluate the success of your actions do not consistently focus on their impact on pupils' achievement.

You promote effectively your pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of fundamental British values. You combine religious education and personal, social and health education in lessons in morals and ethics. Through these lessons, pupils find out about other faiths and have the opportunity to discuss the dangers of radicalisation, seen in such incidents as the Manchester bombing of May 2017. There are also clubs for pupils to enjoy, such as art and football, as well as opportunities to listen to inspirational guest speakers, such as Nelson Mandela's former bodyguard. Some of your pupils have even met a member of the royal family.

You have a good working relationship with the department at the local authority responsible for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have also commissioned an independent educational consultant, who has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school and provides effective support.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The school operates an electronic system for logging concerns and all staff know well how use it. Leaders make referrals to the local authority or children's services promptly.

Training for staff and governors is effective and all know the various signs of abuse. You have provided extra training in matters concerned with, for example, attachment issues and self-harming, as you have identified that pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs may be vulnerable in these areas. You have also identified 'sexting' as an issue that is prominent locally, and have provided

staff with the knowledge and information they need to manage it effectively.

The school's record of checks on members of staff is thorough and complies with guidance. A number of senior staff and governors have appropriate training in safer recruitment.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff know their pupils well and are alert to their needs and to any changes in mood or attitude. Pupils feel very safe and know how to stay safe because of the information they receive in several areas, such as how to be safe online and the risks associated with alcohol and drugs. Pupils say that bullying sometimes happens but that staff and sometimes senior pupils in Year 11 intervene quickly to stop it.

Inspection findings

- In the course of the inspection, I followed a number of key lines of enquiry, which I agreed with you at the start of the day. One of these concerned how strong the teaching and learning of mathematics and science is in the school. This was an area for improvement in the last inspection report. You have taken mainly effective action in this matter, although you recognise that there is still a need for further improvement in mathematics.
- There is now an increased emphasis on practical investigation work in science lessons. The evidence from my series of short visits to classrooms shows that this is well organised and interesting for pupils. A group of pupils in Year 8, for example, were captivated by an investigation that showed how smoking restricts the ability to breathe and clearly understood the implications for their health. Assessment information shows pupils making good progress from their mostly low starting points. You have provided training for staff in science and they have organised science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) projects for pupils. All of these actions have resulted in pupils making good progress in science and an increasing number of pupils achieving qualifications by the end of Year 11.
- There is a relatively recent but ongoing staffing issue that has had a somewhat negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. You have, however, quickly taken action to manage this issue. You have also provided training in mathematics for relevant staff in order to improve achievement for pupils and you have included the improvement of numeracy in your school's improvement plan, with a greater focus on mastery in mathematics. We also saw evidence of mathematics being used in, for example, science lessons, but teachers sometimes missed opportunities to impress on pupils that they were successfully using their mathematical skills. Recent assessment information shows that progress is improving in mathematics, but you are determined to ensure that it is much closer to the rate evident in other subjects, especially English.
- Another key line of enquiry related to how effectively leaders check the quality of teaching and learning and how well they focus their use of pupil premium funding. This was another area for improvement that inspectors identified during

the previous inspection. The good and improving progress that current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make demonstrates that you have addressed this matter well. You have more robust procedures in place now to manage teachers' performance, which include setting targets that are more closely related to pupils' progress and to the school's improvement plan. You carry out formal observations and 'learning walks' to monitor teaching, and you feed back your findings to secure improvements. You have also challenged underperformance with the result that there have been changes in staffing since the last inspection which have contributed well to the good and improving standard of teaching. You have given your deputy headteacher the responsibility for ensuring that leaders target the use of the pupil premium funding more precisely and spend it effectively, using strategies such as one-to-one teaching sessions and work with parents to improve the attendance of relevant pupils. You also have an assessment system that is effective and that you keep under constant review.

- Another focus was about how well pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. You provide a broad curriculum that is under regular review. You adapt it well to pupils' needs and interests and individualise it superbly. Careers guidance is good, with activities such as visits to universities and colleges and the use of alternative provision which lead to apprenticeships and employment. Pupils go on to follow a variety of paths, from pastry chef to undergraduate. The percentage of pupils going on to education, employment or training after the age of 16 is rising year on year, with all but one pupil out of 14 doing so in 2017. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment.
- The next key line of enquiry concerned attendance and how leaders manage fixed-term exclusions. Although attendance figures do not compare favourably to mainstream schools, there is clear evidence of improvement in attendance as new pupils settle into the school and respond to the strategies you have put in place. These include making use of the local authority's attendance service and using your in-house, pupil-family partnership team to encourage parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly. You record absences meticulously and you make prompt checks on absentees as soon as you are aware of them. The variety of the school's curriculum contributes well to the improving attendance. You also manage fixed-term exclusions well, imposing them only when necessary for serious misbehaviour. There are very few repeated exclusions, which shows that you reintegrate your pupils well after they return to school. There are no permanent exclusions.
- Finally, governors understand their responsibilities well. They know the school well and give good support to you and your senior leaders. They provide strong challenge about a range of issues, including finance, the setting-up of the satellite provision and pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress in mathematics is stronger, so that it more closely matches the rate

evident in other subjects

- success criteria in the school's plans for improvement focus more sharply on the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The team inspector and I carried out short visits to all year groups, which were joint activities with you and your assistant headteacher. The team inspector also visited your recently opened satellite provision for small groups of pupils in key stage 4. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of pupils. We held discussions with members of staff, governors, pupils, parents, a representative of the local authority and an independent educational consultant. We also held discussions on the telephone with a senior leader from a local mainstream high school, alternative providers and post-16 providers. We analysed the school's own assessment information. I evaluated one response received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There were no other survey responses.