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26 January 2018

Mr Alan Hardie
Principal
Whitburn Church of England Academy
Whitburn
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Hardie

No formal designation inspection of Whitburn Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your school on 10 January 2018 with Toni Spoons and Bernard Clark, Ofsted Inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was carried out because Whitburn Church of England Academy has undergone a significant change by adding a new key stage. The school has added a sixth form. As a result, the school was selected for inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

Inspectors met with you, your senior leaders, a cross section of staff and some of your middle leaders, governors and pupils. I met with the deputy director of education for the Diocese of Durham. We gathered a range of evidence from conducting observations of learning and from scrutinising pupils' work jointly with your middle and senior leaders. The inspection team checked and evaluated documents, including your website, child protection policy, safeguarding records, school self-evaluation, school improvement plans, attendance and behaviour information and minutes from governors' meetings.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

safeguarding is effective

the overall effectiveness of the school remains outstanding.

Context

The Whitburn Church of England Academy is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school. There are currently 1,180 pupils on the school's roll. Almost all are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is significantly below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average.

The school was inspected in February 2009 and its overall effectiveness was judged to be outstanding. In September 2015, leaders set up a new sixth form. This inspection focused on this new provision and whether leaders are still providing an outstanding education for their pupils.

Inspection findings

Your strong, determined leadership has ensured that the school builds on the successes outlined in the previous inspection report. Your school self-evaluation is refreshingly honest and accurate. You are justifiably proud of the achievements of your pupils. However, you will not allow any complacency. Your leadership team and middle leaders have embraced your vision for the school and you all spell out the same message. The pupils are the focus of your attention and you all want every pupil to fulfil their potential.

The governing body is experienced and ambitious for the pupils of the school. Governors have appropriate education and business backgrounds, which have enabled them to provide real support and challenge for school leaders. Minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate high levels of astute challenge to leaders. Governors have drilled down into key areas for improvement in the school. As a result, leaders, including governors, have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. The diocese adds another effective layer to this support and challenge with their reviews of progress.

The Christian ethos permeates your school and this is clear in the way you manage behaviour. The emphasis is on forgiveness and restorative justice. You reward good behaviour and work hard to improve the behaviour of those who do not reach the high standards you set. Pupils respond well to this and are excellent ambassadors for their school. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in both classrooms and around the school. Attitudes to learning are very positive across the whole ability range. The increase in pupil numbers has put pressure on the system at key times, when pupils are moving from one classroom to another. You are very conscious of the crowded stairways and corridors at such times and pupils give this as an example of something they would like to change in their school. However, despite these difficulties their behaviour is exemplary.

As a teaching school you are constantly striving to keep improving the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils are quick to cite teaching as a strength of the school and they particularly appreciate the way teachers respond when difficulties arise and their willingness to give extra time to their pupils. Pupils also gave examples where the quality of feedback they received really helped them to improve their work. Inspectors saw some excellent examples of incisive, challenging questioning of pupils of all abilities. The quality of teaching in both humanities and English is particularly strong. Typically, you and your senior and middle leaders are not satisfied. You are striving to bring the quality of all teaching to the level of the best.

Pupils in your school have consistently made significantly better progress than their peers nationally with the same starting points. However, progress for the pupils who took GCSE examinations in 2017 was not as positive as in recent years. Neither you nor your governing body made any effort to put a positive slant on these results. You accepted that these results were not up to the standard you have come to expect and set about making sure that results returned to the high standards you have set over a number of years. Your progress information, observation in lessons and close scrutiny of pupils' workbooks demonstrate very clearly that excellent pupil attitudes and strong teaching are leading to very good progress across all year groups. You are naturally self-critical and both you and your governing body are aware that over a number of years pupils have not made the progress in languages they have made in other subjects. The actions you have taken to remedy this are starting to have an impact. The results for the present Year 11 in their mock examinations show that they are on track to make better progress than last year's Year 11. Pupils derived great benefit from the full speaking test practice in their mock examination. However, you accept that there is still work to do in this area, particularly to ensure that teachers set appropriately challenging work for key stage three pupils and give them more scope to write at length in the foreign language.

You and the leaders of the new sixth form have demonstrated the same clarity of vision in setting up the new provision as you have in key stages 3 and 4. Through effective leadership, sixth-form students have high aspirations, know where they are heading and feel well supported on their journey to get there. You monitor teaching and learning regularly and take decisive action, where necessary. As a consequence, teaching in the sixth form is equally effective as in the rest of the school. Teachers know their students well and plan lessons to challenge and support learning. Teachers and students have excellent relationships, which leads to a good atmosphere for learning. There were positives in the first set of post-16 results, such as the progress students made from their starting points in geography, history and English language. However, you are ambitious for your students and want them to make more progress than their peers nationally with the same starting points. Your internal progress information and close scrutiny of student folders show that there are more subjects, now, where students make better progress than national figures. Furthermore, the number of students from the first cohort of sixth-form students gaining places at the most competitive universities is encouraging. The provision for the small number of students who enter the sixth

form without a grade C in English and mathematics is effective. Consequently, progress in both mathematics and English is good and the vast majority of students improve their grade.

All students benefit from a detailed enrichment programme in addition to their A-level subjects to prepare them for their next steps into education, employment or training. Students are aware of a number of progression routes, including university, employment and apprenticeships. Through this effective support, the number of students not in employment, education or training is low. Students' behaviour in the sixth form is exemplary. They are great ambassadors for their sixth form and volunteer their time to support the learning of younger pupils. Sixth-form students undertake work experience and many do voluntary work in the community, developing their skills for employment later in life. Students enjoy their learning and this is reflected in the very good attendance rates in the sixth form.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders and those responsible for governance should make sure that:

- they continue to review and support the languages provision, so that pupils make at least similar progress to pupils nationally with the same starting points.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Diocese of Durham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for South Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Pridding
Ofsted Inspector