

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Sarah Campbell
Headteacher
Settlebeck High School
Long Lane
Sedbergh
Cumbria
LA10 5AL

Dear Mrs Campbell

Short inspection of Settlebeck High School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Annette Patterson, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Settlebeck High School is a school where pupils feel they can be themselves. Leaders and governors have created a close-knit community where staff and pupils say they feel well respected and highly valued. Pupils describe the school as a family. Staff provide pupils with a nurturing environment where they feel well supported to achieve their potential.

Since your appointment in September 2017, you have swiftly and accurately identified which aspects of the school should be refined. You have been open and honest in your approach and have set about the improvements with positive energy. Staff morale is high. Staff relish the career opportunities that working in a small school can offer them. They feel motivated and encouraged to develop professionally.

Pupils feel that the staff care deeply about their academic progress and their well-being. Pupils explained to inspectors that teachers have a strong understanding of pupils' individual needs. This allows pupils to thrive. Parents and carers are loyal and supportive of the school's work. All the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire feel that their children are well looked after at Settlebeck High School. One comment typifies the views parents expressed: 'Staff work hard to get the best out of everyone.'

Governors are committed to ensuring that the school values every pupil. Some pupils at the school have complex needs. Governors are committed to securing the

best outcomes for these pupils. Following your recent appointment as headteacher, governors have provided you with support and challenge in equal measure. Governors' relevant experience and expertise help them to ask insightful questions which help you further improve the school. This is helping you to take the school from strength to strength.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to further improve the quality of teaching by allowing teachers to share good practice. You and your leadership team have created opportunities for teachers to work together. Teachers who spoke with inspectors were enthusiastic about the opportunities that they have to share their expertise. Teachers from different subjects are working collaboratively to improve teaching and learning. For example, teachers of physical education and science are sharing expertise about how they teach similar topics at key stage 3. As a result, pupils are benefiting from improvements in teaching across the curriculum.

You were also asked to further develop the skills of middle leaders. You, alongside your deputy headteacher, have put the necessary systems in place which allow middle leaders to be involved in checking teaching across the school. Middle leaders are confident that this is improving their ability to lead, monitor and improve teaching in their own subjects. There is evidence of this in mathematics and history, where work in pupils' books shows that teachers are routinely challenging pupils. As a result, pupils are progressing more rapidly.

Leaders have worked successfully to embed the school's assessment policy. Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning is supporting pupils to make progress. However, you recognise there is more to do to develop the accuracy of teachers' assessment at key stage 3. Within the cluster of local schools, teachers have the opportunity to work with colleagues in their own subjects. Teachers explained to inspectors about how this work was helping them to refine the accuracy of their assessment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding is everyone's priority. Leaders ensure that all adults are suitable to work with children. Staff training is up to date and leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding updates. Staff follow up on all concerns assiduously. Record-keeping is meticulous. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school works well with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Pupils are confident in how to keep themselves safe, both in the community and online. Pupils are confident to speak with staff in school if they have any worries or concerns. Parents, staff and pupils agree that pupils are well cared for and safe.

Inspection findings

- The broad curriculum offer is a strength of the school. Pupils value studying the wide range of subjects offered by the school at key stage 4. However, the most able pupils are struggling to achieve the high standards of which they are

capable in the GCSEs they sit at the end of Year 10. You have already started to review your approach to the organisation of the curriculum.

- You, alongside your deputy headteacher, have raised leaders', teachers' and pupils' expectations of your most able pupils. During the inspection, we observed teachers challenging pupils in their lessons and the most able pupils were making better progress as a result. For example, in history, teachers challenge Year 7 and 8 pupils to present a reasoned argument to the question: 'Were the Romans more intelligent than us?'
- Attendance rightly continues to be a high priority at Settlebeck High School. The overwhelming majority of pupils attend school on time every day. However, a small number of families struggle to get their children to school. Some of these pupils have already developed poor patterns of attendance at their previous primary or secondary school. You work closely with these pupils and their families to support them to improve their attendance. Although there have been some improvements in attendance, the lack of robust evaluation of strategies is hampering your efforts.
- The proportion of pupils who attend the school who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is considerably higher than the national average. Teachers' high expectations ensure that this group achieves well across the school. Staff have created a safe and supportive learning space for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders. Staff plan activities which are well matched to the needs of the pupils. This allows the pupils who attend the resource base to make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- review and refine their approach to improving attendance, particularly for girls and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- continue to review the curriculum design so that the most able pupils achieve the higher grades of which they are capable
- further improve the reliability of teachers' assessment of pupils' learning at key stage 3.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I had discussions with you, your leadership team, and some members of the governing body. Jointly, my colleagues and I visited classrooms with senior leaders. We visited the resource base for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. We spoke to pupils formally, during lessons and at social times. We analysed the school's website and scrutinised a range of documents, including the single central record, records of child protection, the leaders' self-evaluation and the improvement plan. We also looked at anonymised case studies of pupils in the school. We discussed aspects of safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. We spoke with a number of staff, including middle leaders and teachers who had recently qualified to teach. We considered 51 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free text comments from parents. We also considered 98 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils and 34 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.