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23 March 2018

Mr Alan Birchall
Headteacher
The Byrchall High School
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Dear Mr Birchall

Short inspection of The Byrchall High School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2018 with Osama Abdul Rahim, 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 March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

At the last inspection, inspectors asked you to ensure that teachers match work to the needs of pupils in order for them to make good progress. You have addressed this area with varying levels of success. You have taken some steps to ensure that teachers' assessment information informs pupils' learning. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics. However, this aspect is not showing consistent improvement because some teachers do not routinely use accurate assessment information to prepare learning. As a result, learning does not always challenge pupils to achieve the outcomes of which they are capable. This is particularly the case in science.

Staff have received training to develop their questioning skills. This is having a positive effect on pupils' learning in some subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. In mathematics, pupils make stronger progress than pupils nationally, and in English, pupils make progress that is in line with national averages. However, pupils across the school, especially disadvantaged pupils, can and should achieve more.

You recognise that a legacy of weak teaching in science has seriously hindered pupils' progress in the past. With the support of the trust, you have taken action to

address this aspect of the school. For example, you have made a number of changes to the leadership and the staffing of science. These changes are beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' learning and progress. Nonetheless, there is still a way to go to ensure a substantial and sustained impact on improving pupils' outcomes. It is too early to confirm if the improvements in science will have the desired effect.

You and the governors have sustained the strengths in the ethos of the school. Leaders have created a harmonious, warm and nurturing environment. Pupils enjoy school. They feel that they get help and support from their teachers. Pupils appreciate staff's efforts to enable them to discover and develop their talents. Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer to them. Pupils with whom inspectors spoke explained how staff work hard to ensure that the activities and clubs on offer cater for everyone. Parents and carers feel that their children are happy and that they make good progress. Staff are supportive of the school. Those staff with whom inspectors spoke said they feel proud to be part of the school's warm and open-hearted community.

Trustees and members of the local governing board are supporting leaders to improve the school. The recent strengthening of the governing body means governors offer a diverse range of skills. They bring expertise to their roles from a variety of sectors. Their accurate view of the school means that they understand which aspects of the school still need to improve. For example, they recognise that there are significant weaknesses with pupils' rates of attendance. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils. Governors agree that poor rates of pupil attendance are having a considerable negative effect on the progress that disadvantaged pupils make.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The system to check that adults at the school are suitable to work with children meets requirements. Staff receive regular safeguarding training. This training is up to date. Staff understand the procedures that they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.

The pupils with whom inspectors spoke feel safe. Pupils explained to inspectors how they feel they can talk to an adult in school if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils show understanding, respect and tolerance for other pupils who are from different ethnic backgrounds, faiths and families. They value highly their learning experiences through the 'community and self-progression' curriculum. Pupils explained to inspectors how these lessons provide them with the opportunity to learn about how to write a job application, the dangers of alcohol, as well as how to stay safe online.

School records show that incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils explained to inspectors how teachers deal effectively with any incidents of bullying. Both the staff and the overwhelming majority of parents are confident that their children feel

safe at school.

Inspection findings

- I was interested to focus on rates of pupils' attendance at the school. This is because, in the past, pupils' rates of absence have been above the national average. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Leaders monitor closely pupils' attendance. This allows staff to identify those pupils who have low attendance. As a result, staff provide support for pupils as soon as their attendance becomes a concern. Leaders have put a number of strategies in place to try to reduce pupils' rates of absence. For example, leaders have improved communication with parents about the importance of strong attendance.
- Overall, rates of pupil attendance are broadly in line with the national average. However, despite your efforts, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities remains well below the national average. Although staff work hard to improve rates of pupil attendance, we agree that a lack of effective evaluation in this area is hampering their efforts.
- I was also interested to know about standards of pupils' behaviour. This is because the number of pupils excluded from school for a fixed term in recent years has increased. Leaders' behaviour records show that incidents of poor behaviour are decreasing. The number of pupils excluded from school for a fixed term has also reduced. Pupils, parents and staff share the view that pupils' behaviour supports their learning. Pupils are calm, courteous and polite between lessons and during social times.
- Another focus of the inspection was the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. In the past, disadvantaged pupils have made less progress by the end of key stage 4 than other pupils nationally. This has especially been the case in science and modern foreign languages.
- Leaders have put strategies in place to improve the rates of progress made by disadvantaged pupils. This includes extra help and support for these pupils. Leaders have focused on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. School assessment information and evidence in pupils' books shows that the progress made by disadvantaged pupils is beginning to improve, particularly in English and mathematics.
- However, disadvantaged pupils do not make good progress in a number of subjects. For example, disadvantaged pupils make slower rates of progress in science and modern foreign languages. The low attendance of some disadvantaged pupils continues to be a barrier to securing better outcomes for these pupils. Leaders and inspectors agree that there is still considerable work to do to ensure that the improvements seen already in mathematics and English are realised across other subjects.
- For a number of years, the progress made by pupils in science has been significantly below that of pupils nationally. This is because of weak leadership and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Teachers have not taken into

account pupils' prior knowledge. This links to a poorly planned curriculum and weaknesses in teachers' assessment of pupils' learning. Teachers' inaccurate assessment has meant that activities are not accurately matched to pupils' needs. Pupils explained to inspectors how changes in staffing in the past have also hindered their learning and their progress in science.

- Leaders and those responsible for governance are aware of the weaker aspects in science. They have strengthened the leadership team within science. You have also taken the necessary steps to stabilise staffing in the department. Leaders have worked effectively to improve the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the assessment of pupils' learning. Nonetheless, leaders and inspectors agree that there is still a significant amount of work to be done.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in science remain, particularly at key stage 3. Teachers still do not routinely plan learning that challenges pupils. This means pupils do not always achieve the outcomes of which they are capable. School assessment information and work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making better progress in science than they have in the past. However, gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding from a legacy of weaker teaching in the past are hampering their progress, particularly at key stage 4. For example, some pupils have not had sufficient opportunities to develop their understanding of scientific terminology. You acknowledge that embedding the improvements in the teaching of science remains a priority for leaders. The progress made by pupils in science remains a significant area of concern.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they evaluate and review their approach to the leadership of attendance to secure faster improvements in the reduction of pupils' absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- teachers use accurate assessment information, particularly in science, to plan learning which challenges pupils to achieve the outcomes of which they are capable
- they improve rates of pupil progress in science by ensuring that teachers allow pupils to overcome their lack of skills and knowledge, particularly at key stage 4
- they ensure that the improvements secured in the progress of disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics are replicated across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders, leaders of the science department, a group of teachers and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour between lessons and spoke with pupils during social times.
- Leaders accompanied inspectors on visits to classes where inspectors observed teaching and learning across subjects. Inspectors checked on pupils' work across year groups in English, mathematics and science.
- Inspectors also spoke with some members of the local governing board and some of the trustees. Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including that relating to the governance of the school, safeguarding and leaders' analyses of attendance information. Inspectors also considered the school improvement plan and leaders' self-evaluation documentation.
- Inspectors checked on the contents of the school's website. Inspectors took into account 85 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 74 responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility.