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24 April 2018

Mr Rupert Moreton
Headteacher
Cheney School
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Dear Mr Moreton

Short inspection of Cheney School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018 with Sue Hunt and Gerard Strong, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in September 2017, you and your new leadership team have revitalised your staff. Your drive and determination to improve the outcomes and well-being of your pupils is making a real difference. Many parents commented on the positive improvements you have made, as well as 'the friendly and approachable' staff who deal effectively with their concerns. You know where improvements need to be made, and you have a well-considered plan for further development.

You have rightly focused your initial actions on further improving the quality of provision. Your senior team has shared what effective practice looks like, and routinely checks that this is happening in the classroom. You have introduced a new target-setting process and have insisted that all teachers plan lessons to match the ability of the pupils in their classes. Consequently, staff now typically plan more interesting activities that are appropriately pitched for pupils. However, while leaders track how well pupils are learning, they do not yet evaluate carefully enough the impact of their actions on pupils' progress.

There is an organised, calm and positive ethos throughout the school. Your whole-school approach, 'respect for all', ensures that relationships are strong between

staff and pupils. Staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct, resulting in pupils being well behaved, respectful, and friendly to one another. Pupils told inspectors that 'pupils behave better in lessons this year compared to last year'.

The governors share your ambition that all pupils should be provided with a high-quality educational experience. They know the school's strengths, as well as the weaknesses. They are actively involved in school improvement, and routinely visit the school to evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' actions.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked school leaders to develop a whole-school approach to help those arriving with low literacy skills to catch up. Inspectors also asked leaders to refine and analyse the support for disadvantaged pupils to enable them to learn well. Leaders have subsequently taken effective action to address these recommendations. The whole-school literacy programme includes developing pupils' reading, while enhancing their speaking skills and improving their writing skills. Leaders have implemented a range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils from Years 7 to 13. Leaders have actively recorded which actions have been successful and which have not. However, work to evaluate and consolidate some of the strategies is not yet as sharp as it could be.

In 2017, Year 11 pupils made progress in line with pupils nationally. They did particularly well in English, mathematics and languages, where they achieved above national averages. However, pupils with low attainment made slower progress than those from higher-attaining groups. Disadvantaged pupils, many of whom have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, did not make the same rates of progress as their peers. You have correctly identified that these pupils need to achieve better outcomes, and that teachers need to improve how they support them. You also recognise that, although improving, disadvantaged pupils do not yet attend school regularly enough. Consequently, these groups are identified as whole-school priorities for this school year.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Governors routinely check that all processes and policies meet requirements and that school records are thorough and complete.

The school has a large number of specifically trained safeguarding staff who ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Staff receive useful safeguarding training throughout the year to enable them to keep their knowledge up to date. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and they feel safe at school. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe. Pupils told inspectors that they are confident about whom to go to if they have a concern.

The work of the inclusion department, 'Cheney Plus', is a strength of the school. It provides excellent additional support and counselling for those with complex behavioural and mental health issues. Leaders ensure that pastoral and teaching

staff work closely together to support these vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors looked closely at specific aspects of the school's work, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the progress of disadvantaged pupils; the progress of pupils in optional subjects; sixth-form provision; and the support for those who have weak literacy skills.
- In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made faster progress in their GCSE English and mathematics than in their other subjects. To improve the progress of these pupils, you made this group a whole-school priority and you have directed staff to check that they are engaged and improving in every lesson. Workbooks looked at by inspectors indicate that these pupils are making similar progress to their peers. Your leaders are also working hard to help those with very poor attendance to re-engage with school and their learning. You are positively encouraging their parents and carers to meet with staff during parents' evenings, so that a collaborative programme of support can be put into place. However, you recognise that despite the many actions being taken to improve the attendance and progress of this group, further work is needed to evaluate the success of these interventions.
- You quickly identified that, historically, the curriculum offer to pupils resulted in some pupils sitting exams for their optional subjects before they were ready. Consequently, some pupils were not achieving the grades they were capable of. You have now adjusted the provision for pupils at key stage 4, so that pupils sit exams when they have the maturity to secure the best possible grades. Your whole-school focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning has both strengthened teachers' planning and the progress that pupils make. Pupils clearly take pride in their work, and their books typically indicate an appropriate level of challenge in all of their subjects. In September, leaders introduced a new system for tracking pupils' progress. However, leaders have not yet analysed sufficiently the impact of their work to improve pupils' progress.
- Leaders are developing the post-16 curriculum offer, so that there is a balance of both A-level and vocational provision. In the past, the progress students made post-16 in their A-level subjects has not been as strong as other students nationally. The most able students achieve, and often exceed, expectations. However, those with middle attainment tend not to achieve the grades they are capable of in some of their subjects. You have identified that some middle-attaining students need help to improve their organisation, research and time-management skills. Your recent sixth-form conference, 'how to be a successful sixth former', was well received by students. Those who attended commented on how they were changing their learning behaviour as a result. Unfortunately, a few students in need of support did not attend.
- Your new head of sixth form has a clear plan on how she intends to further improve post-16 provision. These plans include improving the climate for learning by enhancing students' study skills at the beginning of Year 12, and developing some teachers' planning and expectations for sixth form students. These well-judged actions are designed to boost students' skills as well as deepen their

subject knowledge.

- The quality of provision for English across the school is a real strength. There is a range of different activities which support pupils who join the school with weak literacy skills. Current Year 7 pupils with very low literacy skills follow a bespoke curriculum which appropriately focuses on developing their fluency, powers of inference, and writing. Many pupils on this programme are improving their skills significantly, and are able to return to mainstream lessons. Others receive good-quality additional literacy support to further develop their reading and writing. Some Years 7 and 8 pupils with low attainment shared with an inspector pieces of their extended writing of which they were particularly proud. Their work was structured, interesting and well presented. Consequently, despite some pupils joining with low literacy standards, most quickly catch up. As a result, pupils achieve above the national average at key stage 4.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they analyse more carefully the impact of their actions to improve pupils' progress
- they evaluate the impact of provision for disadvantaged pupils, making sure that interventions have a positive effect on their progress across subjects and year groups
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils further improves.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your leadership team. We held meetings with members of the governing body, including the chair of the local governing body, and the chair of the multi academy trust. Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. Inspectors visited 24 lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and/or members of the leadership team. We looked at the school's documentation, including your evaluation of the

school's effectiveness, and the school development plan. We evaluated progress and attendance information relating to current pupils, and reviewed minutes of governors' meetings. We also checked the school's policies relating to safeguarding, the use of additional funding, including pupil premium funding, and the curriculum. Inspectors considered the 88 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.