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Mr Steve Evans
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Dear Mr Evans

Short inspection of Rastrick High School

Following my visit to the school on 18 April 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Peter Cole and Mike Tull, 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 2013, you have set about a systematic rebuilding of the school's senior and subject leadership teams. In addition, you have taken firm action to recruit teachers of high quality. As a result, you have established a strong culture of ambition and high expectations among staff and pupils. Although there is work still to be done, this has led to an improvement in outcomes since the previous inspection.

Together with governors, you are very clear about the actions you had to take in order to further establish consistently strong teaching and leadership. You are equally clear about those areas which require continuing action. As a result of this accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, you have prioritised the right areas and are taking the necessary steps.

You have acted robustly and decisively to address weaknesses in modern foreign languages, as identified in the previous inspection report. As a consequence of these actions, in Year 11 in 2017, pupils' progress in modern foreign languages increased considerably and was well above the national average and in the top 20% of schools nationally. You are now repeating these proven actions in order to address last year's dip in achievement in humanities. Under its new leadership and

with a largely new team of teachers, standards in humanities are rising sharply and bear comparison with standards in other subjects.

Following the previous inspection report, you have taken action to improve the quality of middle leadership. You have successfully communicated your high expectations of middle leaders, who fully understand their responsibilities in raising pupils' outcomes and in holding staff to account for pupils' performance. These colleagues are determined and capable and share your principle of putting pupils first.

You have also acted in order to further establish consistently effective teaching. Through your 'teaching triangle', you closely monitor standards of teaching and, where it is found to be below the required standard, you take action. You and other leaders support and challenge teachers through a range of strategies, including coaching and tailored professional development training. As a consequence, teaching is leading to improved overall outcomes. Some variability still exists, however, such as the use of questions and the pitch of expectations.

You have worked hard to maintain pupils' good attendance and to minimise the amount of persistent absence. Similarly, you have kept rates of exclusion low without compromising on expected standards of behaviour in school. You know that there is work to do in order to reduce the incidence of exclusion of disadvantaged pupils. However, your lack of complacency has ensured that overall rates of absence and exclusion remain better than the national averages.

You have rightly prioritised the sixth form as an area for continued attention. As a result of actions taken since the previous report, progress in some subjects is now among the best in the country. However, progress in other subjects is not as good. You are addressing this variability and there is evidence of improving progress. However, you acknowledge that there is still work to be done in order to improve the consistency of teaching and outcomes across the sixth form.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Systems for checking that adults in the school are safe to work with children are secure and robustly managed. Staff have received the appropriate training in safeguarding matters.

Your designated safeguarding lead, supported by the school's wider safeguarding team, is tenacious in ensuring that your pupils are well cared for and safe. These members of staff act as advocates for the most vulnerable pupils in the school. They are persistent in following up with external agencies in order to get the support your pupils need.

The safeguarding team responds quickly to implement additional support when pupils' changing needs require it. For example, you identified the need to further support pupils with their social, emotional and mental health. To meet this need,

you invested in training 20 staff as mental health first aiders.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school and that there are not any 'no-go zones'. They said that bullying is rare but, when it happens, an adult will sort it out. They are clear about who they would go to should they need to report any bullying or if they were worried about anything, and they are confident that the school would deal with the problem.

Inspection findings

- As a result of your continued focus on the quality of teaching, pupils are routinely engaged in their learning and there is a high level of collaboration between pupils and teachers. This enables high-quality discussion and writing to take place. For example, in Year 11 history, pupils were pushed to extend their knowledge and understanding of the effects of Norman church reform and the dangers to medieval towns.
- Effective use of questioning was evident in a range of subjects. In Year 10 Spanish and Year 10 French, for example, teachers' use of the target language and their questions pushed pupils to further extend their skills. In Year 9 religious education, effective use of questions stretched pupils in their understanding of different attitudes towards the sanctity of life. The quality of questioning is sometimes less effective, however, when it stops short of really pushing pupils to a greater depth of understanding.
- There is an appropriate level of challenge and expectation across most teaching. In Year 8 mathematics, for instance, pupils were learning about areas of a circle. The work was appropriately demanding for them. In Year 11 English, a persistent focus on reading comprehension skills at a suitably challenging level has led to pupils making good progress over time. In some subjects and lessons, however, the expectation of what pupils could achieve is not always quite as high as it could be.
- In the sixth form, while overall students achieve well, there is some variability in rates of progress between subjects. In Year 13 in 2017, in applied general subjects for example, progress was well above average and in the top 20% of schools nationally. Progress was not as good in some academic A-level subjects, although school information points towards an improved picture for students' outcomes in the 2018 external examinations. In Year 12 chemistry and Year 12 geography, students are making good progress as the result of effective teaching. In these subjects, students can articulate the specific things they need to do in order to improve. In other subjects, however, students are not as clear and so progress is slower.
- Middle leaders are an increasingly effective team. They have the capacity, along with senior leaders, to drive school improvement even further. Middle leaders speak convincingly about the systems and processes you have introduced since the previous inspection. Specifically, you have established a common approach to how and when leaders monitor pupils' progress. This is made effective through a rigorous cycle of discussions about how well pupils are doing and what actions are to be taken when pupils fall behind. Middle leaders are unanimous in how

much this process enables them to intervene quickly with any pupils who are underperforming. As a result of having the right people in place, using the process consistently, outcomes across a range of subjects are rising. The school's performance at key stage 4 is now significantly above the national average.

- Pupils conducted themselves well throughout the inspection. Your school is an orderly and calm environment, with high standards of respectful behaviour. Inspectors saw no instances of disruptive behaviour in lessons or around the school. Pupils told us that behaviour overall is good, but that a small number of lessons are sometimes disrupted with poor behaviour, a view shared by a small proportion of parents and carers. You have made careful use of exclusion to challenge unacceptable behaviour where necessary, while the rate of fixed-term exclusion and permanent exclusion is below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of pupils in each key stage is further strengthened by the use of more demanding questions to further extend pupils' knowledge and skills
- teachers in the sixth form are consistently clear about the next steps students should take in order to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, a sample of subject leaders and the chair of the board of directors. We met with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5 and also spoke informally with them around the school. We met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, teaching and learning and attendance and behaviour. We also met with middle leaders. We conducted joint visits to lessons with you, the leader of the sixth form and the senior leader for teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about what they were learning and their progress. We looked in detail at pupils' books and folders. I took into account results from Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff (73 responses) and Parent View (77 responses), including 34 free-text responses. We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, safeguarding records, behaviour and attendance records, including bullying logs, pupils' assessment and progress information and other documents available on the school website.