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Dear Dr James Pullé

Short inspection of Wilmslow High School

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 2018 with Deborah Bailey, Ofsted inspector, and Linda Griffiths, 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 October 2013.

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.**

You and other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, share a clear vision for the school's pupils, based upon their development as well-rounded, confident and outward-looking citizens. You take steps to ensure that pupils are known and cared for well by staff. Consequently, the school is a place where pupils say that they are happy and secure. Your staff take great care to support pupils to stay safe and maintain their emotional well-being. Many of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, described the school in positive terms. Ninety-two per cent of the 376 respondents indicated that they would recommend it to others.

Thank you for the openness and professional integrity that you and other senior leaders demonstrated throughout the inspection. You know the school well. As we discussed during the inspection, despite the school's strengths, which include sixth-form outcomes, there are areas which have not developed securely and consistently since the last inspection. Leadership has not been fully effective in resolving the weaker aspects identified at the last inspection. Assessment information is now being used more successfully by teachers at key stage 4 to plan work that closely matches pupils' ability. However, success is less evident in key stage 3.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities remains an ongoing focus for leaders. Furthermore, your plans to accelerate the progress of pupils in these groups are appropriate and they are understood by all, including those responsible for governance. Despite this, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities continue to make very mixed progress across the curriculum as a result of variabilities in the quality of teaching and support.

Most pupils like coming to school, so they typically behave well and attend regularly. Most pupils attain the GCSE grades that they should and the most able often make progress that is better than that of others nationally. Pupils typically make better progress in key stage 4 and the sixth form than in key stage 3, where pupils' progress is inconsistent. You have taken steps to reduce this variability and, in some cases such as in English, this has been effective. However, you recognise that too much variation in pupils' progress remains within and across subjects in key stage 3. The progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils is significantly lower than that of others nationally. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities also suffer from poor attendance and do not routinely make the progress that they should. Despite the effective support provided by SEN specialists in school, teachers do not consistently set work at an appropriate level and provide support that closely matches these pupils' needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

You lead a large school of almost two thousand pupils and recognise the challenges that this provides to ensure that all pupils are known well. You and other leaders take effective steps to ensure that staff build positive relationships with pupils. Staff prioritise pupils' safety and well-being, which in turn creates a culture of vigilance and security. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. Procedures to recruit staff safely are established. Inspectors checked the school's site security systems and found that effective measures are in place to ensure pupils' safety. Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet, and this aspect is further supported by the school's filtering systems.

Most pupils say that they feel safe in school and parents agree. The pupils with whom inspectors spoke said that they are happy, confident and cared for well. Pupils say that bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, is rare. Pupils describe a strong culture of anti-bullying in school and say that bullying is not tolerated. Where there are incidents of bullying, pupils say that staff deal with them effectively. Pupils' well-being is a key priority of school leaders. Consequently, leaders ensure that staff are well trained in this area. They also employ the services of mental health professionals to support and secure the well-being of pupils.

Inspection findings

- The first aspect that we considered was the effectiveness of school leaders in ensuring that the pupil premium funding is managed effectively. You and other leaders, including those responsible for governance, accurately identify the need to secure more rapid and significant improvement in this area. Disadvantaged pupils were not routinely making the progress that they should at the time of the previous inspection in October 2013, so this was reported as an area for improvement.
- However, disadvantaged pupils' progress has not improved significantly since then, and the examination outcomes of these pupils in 2016 and 2017 were significantly lower than others nationally. The picture for current disadvantaged pupils shows some early signs of improvement. In particular, these pupils are making faster progress in English. However, in other subjects, and throughout all year groups, disadvantaged pupils continue to make insufficient progress. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are studying for the English Baccalaureate at key stage 4 is significantly lower than that of others nationally, and others in school of similar ability. As a result, too few disadvantaged pupils attain this broad suite of academic qualifications at the end of Year 11. Information provided by school leaders shows that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, including that of some pupils who have a poor record of attendance, is showing signs of improvement. However, the overall attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains low.
- The second area of focus was the effectiveness of school leaders in ensuring that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive a good standard of education and make the progress that they should. Inspectors found that pupils with an education, health and care plan are routinely supported effectively. This includes those in the SEN resourced provisions for pupils who are hearing impaired and those with autistic spectrum disorder. Staff know these pupils well and are trained to meet their needs effectively. Therefore, these pupils make good progress.
- You described the evolution of the school's provision for pupils who require SEN support, since it was identified as an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection. You and other school leaders accurately recognise that too much variability remains in the progress that these pupils make within and across subjects. Some teachers are more effective than others in planning for and supporting these pupils' needs. This inconsistency means that, while some pupils who have SEN support make good progress, others do not. Too often, teaching for these pupils fails to capitalise on the gains that are made with the support of the SEN team outside of lessons. You are committed to improving further the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, but have so far been unable to ensure that it is in line with that of others nationally.
- The third area that we looked at was teachers' use of information regarding pupils' previous attainment, to set work that is pitched at the right level. This was an area for improvement identified at the last inspection. School leaders, including those responsible for governance, have a clear understanding of the progress made and of areas still requiring development in this aspect. Senior leaders have introduced a summary profile for every pupil, which they expect teachers to use when planning

work. The profile contains useful information and, where it is used best, such as in English, pupils make strong progress. Senior leaders say that teachers use this information more regularly and effectively in key stage 4 than in key stage 3, where pupils' progress and the quality of teaching is too variable. Consequently, many pupils, including the most able, make strong progress in Year 10 and 11 because the work they are set is challenging and well matched to their ability. However, in Year 7 and 8, this is not consistently the case.

- The final area we considered was the outcomes of students who attend the sixth form, including those who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities. We found that these outcomes are a strength of the school. The sixth form is highly regarded locally and, accordingly, it is a popular choice for many local students. Students who meet the sixth form's entry requirements join from a range of schools. They make strong progress on courses, which include a wide range of A-level and vocational subjects. You are correct in saying that students' attainment at the end of their courses prepares them well for the next stages in their education and/or employment. For example, of the most recent leavers, almost all have moved on to further education, including those who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities. Many have embarked upon courses at Russell Group universities, including Cambridge and Oxford University.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively so that these pupils make progress that is in line with that of others nationally
- teachers routinely support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to make the progress that they should
- the attendance of pupils who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities matches others nationally
- all teachers use the information available to set work that matches pupils' needs and abilities, especially in 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 Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings took place with school leaders, members of the local governing body and representatives of the local authority.

- Discussions were held with pupils to gather their views on a variety of issues, including safeguarding, bullying, well-being, behaviour and teaching.
- Inspectors examined a range of the school's documentation such as its self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, the pupil premium plan, minutes of governing body meetings, attendance and behaviour records and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors considered 376 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, 322 responses to the Ofsted online pupil questionnaire and 108 responses to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors conducted learning walks and lesson observations across a range of subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis with school leaders.