

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



25 May 2018

Mr Andrew O'Brien  
Executive Headteacher  
Accrington Academy  
Queens Road West  
Accrington  
Lancashire  
BB5 4FF

Dear Mr O'Brien

### **Short inspection of Accrington Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 2018 with Julie Bather, Ofsted Inspector, and Phil Hyman, 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.**

You and other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, have a clear vision for the school's pupils. The opportunities that you provide support pupils in becoming aspirational, confident and outward-looking citizens. Inspectors were struck by the vibrancy and warm nature of the pupils at your school, which are a demonstrable impact of the school's strong pastoral culture and commitment. Pupils are known and cared for well by staff. Consequently, the school is a place where pupils say that they are happy and secure. There is vigilance in ensuring and supporting pupils' emotional well-being and safety.

Pupils say that they like coming to school. Accordingly, they behave well and attend regularly, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The pupils with whom inspectors spoke and almost all the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View', described the school in positive terms and would recommend it to others.

Pupils' well-being is a priority for you and other school leaders. Approximately 700 pupils recently completed an in-school mental health survey, which highlighted strengths and recommendations. You have acted on the aspects raised by pupils. For example, a team of pupils have now received mental health support training

and part of the school has been established as a mental health support area. Furthermore, staff have been trained to support and secure the well-being of pupils.

You and other senior leaders that I met during the inspection, including the representative of the United Learning Trust, of which the school is part, know the school well. As we discussed, leaders have taken proportionate steps to resolve some of the weaker aspects identified at the last inspection, such as the plans to strengthen numeracy across the curriculum. The sixth form is a strength of the school. It is well-regarded by the local community and is a popular choice for students from the school and other schools to continue their studies after Year 11. They value the record of examination success that students have in the courses that they follow and the support that students receive. An increasing number of students move on to study at university, including those in the Russell Group. However, despite the school's strengths, there are areas of concern which have emerged since the last inspection.

Pupils' progress, especially in English, mathematics and other academic subjects, was weaker than that of others nationally in 2017. Consequently, pupils' examination outcomes in these areas were significantly lower than those of others nationally. You accurately identified that they were especially concerning for pupils who had high starting points, and for boys in English. You explained that a contributory factor to these poor outcomes was the challenging circumstances that school leaders have previously encountered in recruiting and retaining strong teachers. You described the steps that leaders have taken to overcome this aspect and the impact that this has had in securing more stable and effective teaching than was the case previously.

We found that the progress of current pupils is stronger than previously, but as you are aware, inconsistencies remain within and across subjects, despite the training that leaders have provided to reduce the variability in teaching. Teachers do not routinely set pupils work closely matched to their ability, especially for the most able pupils. You described the plans that are in place to secure stronger outcomes for boys in English, history and some other academic subjects. The pupils' work that we analysed confirmed that these plans are beginning to have a positive impact, but that boys' progress and attainment in these subjects remains lower than that of girls.

We saw variability in teachers' expectations of pupils' work. Some teachers routinely insist upon the high standards of accuracy and presentation in pupils' work that you expect. However, others do not. In these cases, pupils' attitudes to learning are not as good as they should be. For example, in some areas the standard of Year 7 pupils' work has deteriorated. These pupils do not work with enough precision; they make too many mistakes; misconceptions are not rectified; and they do not present their work with sufficient care.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. We spoke to a range of staff and found that they prioritise pupils' safety and well-being, thereby ensuring a culture of vigilance and security. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies. You and other leaders have planned activities to eliminate risks to pupils in innovative ways. For example, your work to protect pupils from radicalisation has attracted local and national recognition. You have engaged the school and the local community in arts-based projects focused on this aspect of safeguarding. These have been effective in raising and sustaining an understanding and awareness of risks, thereby securing pupils' safety in this aspect.

Systems to recruit staff safely are established. 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 school security systems and filters. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and their parents agree. They say that bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, is rare. Pupils describe a strong culture of anti-bullying and some say that they have never witnessed any forms of bullying in their time at the school. Where there are incidents of bullying pupils say that staff deal with them effectively.

## **Inspection findings**

- The first area that we looked at was how well teachers use information about pupils to set work at the right level. You and other leaders, including those responsible for governance, have a clear understanding of where progress has been made and of the areas that remain too weak in this aspect. Where teachers use information about pupils well, pupils make the progress of which they are capable. However, you are accurate in saying that such practice is inconsistent within and across subjects. We and your school leaders saw too many examples of where the work set for pupils does not match their ability. This is especially the case for the most able pupils. Consequently, these pupils do not routinely make the progress that they should. We and your school leaders also found that there is variability in the expectations that teachers have of pupils' work. Where teachers insist on the high standards of care and accuracy that you expect of pupils' work, they make stronger progress. However, pupils are not making the progress that they should, including those in Year 7. Some teachers are too lax in securing good standards of accuracy and care from pupils in their work.
- Our second focus area was to investigate whether numeracy is taught effectively across the curriculum, so that pupils make the progress that they should. This was an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection. The plans that you have made and the actions that you have taken have been sensible, proportionate and effective. Your first step was to audit the numeracy requirements and teaching expertise across all subjects. This provided an accurate picture of strengths, needs and next steps. Consequently, you have ensured that any discrepancies and the bad habits that you saw in teaching have been rectified, and that all pupils have mastered numeracy basics such as

learning their multiplication tables. Your current phase in the development of this aspect is focused on strengthening consistency and effective use of numeracy in geography and science, as these are subjects where numeracy is required more consistently than others.

- We investigated whether the attainment of disadvantaged students in the sixth form is similar to that of others. This was an area for improvement noted at the time of the last inspection. You and other leaders have been effective in raising the aspirations of students, including those who are disadvantaged. A greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils, including those with high key stage 2 scores, stay on in the school sixth form than was the case previously. Many of these follow A-level courses, including those in university-facilitating subjects. We found that disadvantaged students' examination grades in 2017 matched the high standard set by others. They made strong progress from their starting points and attained high grades. Consequently, these students moved on to next steps in education and employment that matched their ability. Disadvantaged students currently in the sixth form make strong progress, in A-level and vocational courses.
- The final area that we considered was whether the curriculum meets pupils' interests and needs. This line of enquiry also considered the English curriculum for boys, as their examination results in this subject in 2017 were especially weak. You and other leaders described to us the rationale for the courses offered. You were adamant that they are matched to meet pupils' needs. You provided strong examples of where this is currently the case. Key stage 3 has been extended, so that pupils are provided with opportunities to learn with depth, precision and fluency. Pupils are encouraged to follow a broad range of courses, and so academic, arts and vocational options are provided at key stage 4. You explained that although the courses offered are well matched to pupils' interests and needs, pupils have not routinely attained the examination grades of which they are capable previously, because of inconsistency in the quality of teaching. We agreed that the courses currently offered to pupils meet their needs.
- We saw that the actions that you and other leaders have put in place to improve the outcomes of boys in English are beginning to have a positive impact. Boys are now enjoying the texts that they are reading and they are analysing more than was the case previously. Boys are benefiting from the drive to improve the level of extended writing across the school, as they are provided with more opportunities to practise and refine their writing skills. However, the variation in teachers' expectations of pupils' care and accuracy, including in spelling, punctuation and grammar, means that their outcomes are inconsistent. Consequently, boys' progress and attainment in English continue to be lower than that of the girls.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- variability in the quality of teaching across a range of academic subjects is eradicated, so that it is consistently good

- all teachers use the information available to set work that matches pupils' abilities, especially for the most able, so that they make the progress that they should
- plans to improve boys' progress across a range of subjects, including English, are fully effective, so that boys' outcomes consistently match those of others
- all teachers match school leaders' expectations and insist upon high standards of care and accuracy in pupils' work, especially for pupils in Year 7.

I am copying this letter to 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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Meetings took place with you and your school leaders, members of the local governing body, and a senior representative of the United Learning Trust. Discussions were held with pupils to gather their views on a variety of issues including safeguarding, bullying, well-being, behaviour and teaching. We examined a range of the school's documentation such as self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, the pupil-premium plan, minutes of governing body meetings, attendance and behaviour records and safeguarding information. We considered 27 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire, Parent View, 32 responses to the Ofsted online pupil questionnaire and 56 responses to the Ofsted online staff questionnaire. We conducted learning walks across a range of subjects and year groups. We scrutinised the work in pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis together with school leaders.