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Mr Ian McCaul
Principal
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Dear Mr McCaul

Short inspection of Chiltern Way Academy

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 2018 with Catherine Davies, 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 your predecessor schools were judged to be good in January and March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspections. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The Chiltern Way Academy was created in 2016 from the Chiltern Way Federation which was formed from two school sites. The campuses are six miles apart and provide education for pupils who have different special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have created provision that is carefully matched to the needs of all pupils which enables them to succeed at school. Pupils are polite and respectful towards each other and all adults on site. You rightly noted that the pupils are the school's 'outstanding feature'. Staff agreed that pupils are well looked after and that warm and positive relationships exist between them. The school's mission statement, to 'make an enduring difference to our students' lives, guiding and supporting them to find their own pathway to becoming happy, productive and successful members of society', is clearly evident in every aspect of the school's work. Leaders are passionate in their drive to ensure that this happens.

The curriculum is highly personalised and tailored to meet the different needs of each pupil. The focus on attitude, skills and knowledge means that pupils make

exceptional progress in improving their behaviour, both socially and emotionally. Parents and carers are very pleased with all that the school offers. They were highly complimentary about the school and mentioned how much their children enjoy school. One parent said that her child wanted to come to school during the half-term holiday. Parents could not praise the staff highly enough for their hard work in making the school a 'safe haven' for their children, one saying that the school is a 'wonderful support towards us as a family.' There is a whole-staff commitment to doing what is best for all pupils.

Leaders have taken effective action to address the areas of improvement identified at the times of the last inspections of the individual predecessor schools. Most pupils make strong progress across the curriculum, achieving success in a range of qualifications. Leaders are determined to ensure that all pupils are able to gain employment or further education and training when they leave the school. All staff work relentlessly hard in order to help pupils to achieve this. However, teachers and leaders do not always have sufficiently high expectations of the most able pupils.

Staff are well trained and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They use positive strategies to resolve any challenging situations, and behavioural incidents are analysed to inform further action. As a result, inappropriate behaviour is managed effectively and is declining. The rate of fixed-term exclusions has also reduced as a result of the work done in developing pupils' emotional resilience. This has meant that pupils are better at understanding and regulating their emotions. However, the rate of reduction in exclusions has slowed in the last year.

Raising attendance has been a focus for leaders for some years, and last year saw an increase in the overall rate of attendance. Leaders are keen for pupils to understand how education will give them the behaviours and attitudes that are necessary if they are to be successful in life after school. Incentives have been introduced to encourage pupils to improve their attendance rates, and pupils are keen to access these rewards. Parent and carer information days are provided in order that parents can engage with external agencies and relevant support services. Feedback from parents following these information days indicates that they find them very helpful in removing barriers that impede attendance and progress. However, persistent absenteeism remains an issue for a minority of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made certain that there is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Safeguarding is very high on the list of priorities, and leaders have invested in additional staff to promote safeguarding, welfare and attendance across the school. Staff training is comprehensive and responds well to individual pupils' needs and local risks. The single central record of staff-suitability checks is thorough and meets all requirements. All staff are involved in proactively identifying pupils at risk, and target support accordingly, often avoiding problems before they happen. The provision of extended hours at school also contributes to helping to keep pupils safe.

Pupils feel safe and secure at school, and can talk to adults about anything that causes them concern. These warm relationships between staff and pupils were evident throughout the inspection. The parents that responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed that their children are safe and well looked after at school. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding makes regular visits to the school in order to check that safeguarding is a very high priority for all staff.

The safeguarding team is tenacious in following up issues with the local authority where necessary, and stand firm and challenge decisions that they do not feel are in a pupil's best interests.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at: how effectively leaders ensure that pupils make strong progress; the effectiveness of leaders' action to challenge absence and poor behaviour; and how well pupils are prepared for further education, training and employment.
- The curriculum is highly tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. This ensures that all pupils acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge required to enable them to become happy, safe and successful adults. Regular training for staff helps them to improve their knowledge of pupils' differing educational needs, their own styles of teaching, and ways of approaching and engaging pupils. There is strong collaboration between teaching staff to ensure that the curriculum design and lesson planning is closely matched to the needs of all pupils. This means that pupils are focused on their learning and enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils take pride in their work, and make strong progress. Pupils are aware of what they need to do in order to improve, because staff give regular, high-quality guidance to help them. In some lessons, the most able pupils are not given sufficiently challenging work in order to accelerate their progress.
- The provision of extended hours at school helps some students to broaden their interests and activities and catch up with any missed work. Courses are deliberately chosen to ensure that students can be as successful as possible in their learning. For instance, the introduction of the IGCSE in science, with a curriculum designed to be very practical, has led to 100% of pupils passing this exam last year.
- There has been a sustained improvement in attendance levels for a number of years and leaders are determined to continue to drive it upwards further, particularly for the small minority of pupils who are persistently absent.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced dramatically over the last few years. Staff work very hard to ensure that work in improving behaviour is proactive and they are highly vigilant from the moment pupils arrive on site. Nevertheless, the pace of reduction in exclusions has slowed recently.
- There are measures in place to keep staff aware of anything that might have happened out of school and to ensure that appropriate support is in place to make individual students feel safe and secure. Parent information days have

been instrumental in helping parents to support their children at school, and as a consequence, parents are actively engaged in ensuring that their children attend school regularly. Reward systems for the best levels of attendance are in place and pupils are keen to achieve these rewards. This is because they understand that the more they are at school, the more progress they can achieve.

- The curriculum has been carefully designed to give pupils the skills they need to flourish socially and emotionally and become successful adults. There is a strong focus on equipping pupils with employable skills. Vocational courses give pupils 'taster' sessions through key stage 3, and they are popular choices for study in key stage 4. Several pupils have successfully gained apprenticeships provided by the school, and one parent reported to inspectors that the food and hygiene certificate gained by their child has enabled him to gain employment at weekends.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, are given sufficient academic challenge
- levels of exclusion, absence and persistent absence are reduced further.

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 Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Edwards
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors held a number of meetings with you, other senior leaders and some middle leaders. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors on a series of short visits to lessons on both sites. The inspection team held discussions with different leaders about safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, and assessment and progress information. A meeting was held with three governors, including the chair and vice-chair. A telephone conversation was held with the school improvement partner. Meetings were held with groups of pupils on both sites. A meeting was also held with a small group of parents, and one inspector had a telephone conversation with a parent. Inspectors looked at a range of documents. This included the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, attendance, behaviour and exclusion data, records of pupils' progress and attainment and evidence of records to keep pupils safe. Responses from Parent View and the Ofsted staff survey were also considered.