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Mr Joe Barker
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Dear Mr Barker

Short inspection of Marple Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 11 September 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Alison Stott and Tuesday Humby, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects and a larger proportion of pupils than seen nationally study and achieve the English Baccalaureate. Pupils' performance in mathematics, French and Spanish is particularly strong. A sophisticated system for tracking pupils' progress ensures that pupils who fall behind are quickly identified and supported effectively.

You have developed a strong and enthusiastic leadership team who are keen to drive improvement at Marple Hall School. You and your team know the school's strengths and have a clear vision for the future. While you are well aware of the school's areas for development, the actions taken to address these do not always lead to strong improvement. This is because you do not always clearly determine the underlying causes of issues before acting.

You and your leadership team have a strong focus on improving teaching. High-quality professional development has been delivered regularly and teachers work together to share good practice. Teachers value the time that they are given to develop their teaching skills. This has ensured that teachers were ready to meet the challenges of the new curriculum and deliver high-quality teaching that meets the needs of pupils.

At the time of the last inspection, homework was not used appropriately by all teachers. This has been a key area of development in training sessions for staff. You have encouraged teachers to consider the latest research in helping pupils to recall learning. Several activities were trialled, and pupils' progress improved as a result. This was particularly true for disadvantaged pupils. This year, you have restructured homework tasks to incorporate the most appropriate activities to support pupils' progress.

During the last inspection, inspectors commented that, in some classrooms, the learning environment was not as well ordered as in the rest of the school. This was because some teachers did not use the school's policies appropriately. You have developed and successfully embedded the 'Marple Hall Spirit' to ensure that pupils endeavour to succeed at the highest standards they can achieve. You have ensured that all those who work at the school have high expectations of pupils. The consistent application of the school's policies ensures that there is an equal offer for pupils in all classrooms.

In conversations with inspectors, pupils were confident and articulate. They were keen to express their enjoyment of the many opportunities that they are given to take responsibility for their own actions and to contribute to leadership. Year 7 pupils talked about how they had enjoyed their start at Marple Hall School. Older pupils described how much they enjoyed 'Spark' day, which raised £3,000 for local charities.

The staff who spoke to the inspectors said that they were proud to be part of the school. They feel motivated, well supported and valued. Teachers appreciate the consideration that you give to their workload and feel that leaders demonstrate concern for staff well-being.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They have confidence in you and the leadership team. Parents say that they are kept informed about their children's progress and that any concerns they may have are dealt with promptly. Parents feel that their children are well cared for and that leaders always have the pupils' best interests at the heart of any decisions. Parents spoke about the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to pupils and how much they enjoyed the Year 9 graduation day.

Governance is strong. The members of the governing board bring a wide range of skills and experience to their role. They have confidence in the leadership team and appreciate the training that you and the deputy headteachers contribute to the meetings. They know what the school is doing well and where it needs to improve. They take their role very seriously and know how important it is to hold you to account for school improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders are fully aware of your safeguarding responsibilities and safeguarding procedures are robust. All necessary checks are made to ensure that

all staff employed at the school are suitable to work with children. All staff receive safeguarding training regularly and leaders provide timely updates. Consequently, all staff are vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety.

Pupils feel safe in school. Pupil prefects in Years 9 and 10 receive safeguarding training so that they can mentor peers where appropriate. Pupil anti-bullying ambassadors allow pupils to talk about bullying concerns in a non-threatening environment. Pupils said that they know who to talk to if they have a concern, but bullying is rare and dealt with quickly by staff when it happens.

Pupils can talk confidently about keeping themselves safe online and enjoyed meeting the sniffer dogs when they learned about the dangers of drugs. They clearly understand the importance of tolerance and told inspectors that they had never heard any racist language in school.

Inspection findings

- Continuous school improvement is at the heart of your leadership. However, you and your leadership team do not always ensure that you have a clear understanding of the issues to address before acting. As a result, actions do not always result in the improvement expected. Sharper evaluations of the issues causing underperformance would lead to more effective actions for improvement.
- Teaching and learning have been key focuses since the last inspection and continue to be high priorities. Teaching meets the needs of most pupils and they learn well. However, disadvantaged pupils continue to make less progress than other pupils. Since the last inspection, you have acted to address this issue and have had some success in closing this gap. Nonetheless, this continues to be a key focus for the school.
- You and your team have worked hard to improve attendance so that all pupils benefit from the improvements in teaching. Attendance has improved and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has reduced. Despite this improvement, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school remains high. This remains a focus for improvement.
- The changes that you have made to the behaviour policy have ensured that the number of times that pupils are excluded from school for a fixed period have reduced considerably. This is particularly true for disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop a detailed understanding of the reasons for underperformance as a basis for planning effective improvement strategies
- raise the attendance and reduce the rate of exclusion of disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we examined a range of documents, including safeguarding records and policies, information on pupils' performance and attendance and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.

We met with you and other members of your leadership team. I met with three members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair.

We observed lessons with school leaders in several subject areas and looked at work in the pupils' books. Together with senior leaders, we also examined the work of current Year 11 pupils in English, mathematics and science. We spoke formally to groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 and informally to others around the school. We observed pupils' behaviour both in and out of lessons.

We reviewed the 28 responses to the pupils' survey and the 265 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the 265 responses that parents submitted to the free-text service and the 108 responses to the staff questionnaire.