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Mrs Catherine Reid
Headteacher
Clayton Hall Academy
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Dear Mrs Reid

Short inspection of Clayton Hall Academy

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Mark Feldman, 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 June 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.**

Since your appointment to the school at Easter 2018, you have quickly established yourself as a leader with a real determination to stem the decline of the school. You have appointed a number of key senior leaders and, together, you all provide exceptionally strong leadership. You and your leadership team have an incisive and accurate view of the school's performance. You have lost no time in identifying the key issues and implementing clear plans to address the areas of weakness. While many of these plans are still in their infancy, your rapid and relentless drive to improve pupils' outcomes means that there is a clear and collective vision to tackle and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

You and your team are bold and ambitious and have tackled underperformance without delay. You are building the confidence of the staff, many of whom speak very positively about the changes you are implementing. Staff trust you and share your clear vision of eradicating underperformance to ensure that pupils achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.

However, the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for the most able and for disadvantaged pupils, remains variable across the school. Teachers do not consistently plan work that is well matched to pupils' learning needs. As a result,

many pupils complete work that is too easy for them. It does not enable them to develop their knowledge and skills as quickly as they should. You and your team recognise this and have started to make some significant changes to ensure that teachers' planning meets pupils' needs more effectively. The full impact of this work, however, is yet to be seen.

Outcomes in mathematics and science over the last three years have been too low. You have made some key appointments in science, which are leading to decisive actions being taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning in this subject area. Leaders are putting in place clear strategies, focused on ensuring that teaching in mathematics and science is challenging and of high quality. These changes are leading to some improvements but you recognise that teaching is still not as good as it should be.

Most parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted Parent View survey are happy with the school and speak highly of the care it provides for its young people. However, some parents are concerned about the high level of staff absence and poor teaching, particularly in mathematics and science. One parent wrote, 'Some of the teaching is excellent, but this is not consistent across the school.' You share their concerns and are making some rapid changes to ensure that the quality of teaching improves.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors take your responsibility for keeping pupils safe very seriously. You and your leadership team have developed a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

Leaders and managers check that all new staff are made aware of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' through their robust induction process. Leaders provide high-quality and regular training to ensure that safeguarding is effective. Leaders liaise well with any external agencies when necessary. Staff follow the school's policies and procedures consistently to report any concerns they identify about pupils' welfare or well-being. Leaders are very quick to act on these concerns and make sure that pupils receive any support they may need. Written records about any such concerns and the actions taken are timely and thorough. The required checks on staff before they are employed are carried out and suitably recorded in line with statutory requirements.

Inspection findings

- Since your appointment as headteacher, you have worked hard to make significant changes to increase the capacity in senior leadership. You have appointed a vice-principal in charge of raising standards. This appointment is leading to an increased focus on improving outcomes for all pupils, but particularly for the most able and those who are disadvantaged. This has resulted in pupils making better progress, although you recognise that they are still not achieving as highly as they should.

- You and your leaders are implementing effective plans for staff training. You and your team monitor lessons closely and have a robust system for challenging weak teaching. You have developed a high-quality programme of professional development and this is leading to greater time for teachers to plan together and learn from the very best. Although the full impact of this is yet to be seen, you are able to clearly tailor support where it is most needed. Staff are, generally, very supportive of your drive to improve the school. They recognise the need to be challenged, but are also appreciative of the support that is offered through high-quality professional development. This is leading to some improvements in the quality of teaching.
- The multi-academy trust has been instrumental in setting up a number of reviews and has urgently effected change in key staff. You and your team have welcomed this and are working hard to ensure that the recommendations from the reviews are carried out. For example, the school is beginning to work far more with other schools. Teachers are sharing examples of good practice and planning together and there are effective plans in place to address the underperformance in key areas. However, as these plans are newly introduced, it is too soon to report on their impact.
- Science outcomes have been too low for a number of years. You have made some key changes to address the underperformance in science. The appointment of science leaders from the multi-academy trust has been instrumental in identifying quickly the key issues and putting plans in place to improve outcomes. For example, the new director of science is ensuring that teachers use more rigorous assessments to plan more carefully to meet pupils' learning needs and help them make better progress.
- Another key area for the school is improving the outcomes of the most able. The progress of the most able pupils has been declining. This is because learning is not always well matched to pupils' learning needs. Work is often too easy and pupils are not challenged to extend their thinking. Teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to develop their extended writing skills, particularly in mathematics and science. The school now has a clear vision of how to improve the achievement of the most able by focusing on increasing aspiration and challenge. However, the impact of this is yet to be seen.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is not strong enough. The previous inspection report stated that governors needed to monitor more sharply the impact of pupil premium funding. Governors have only recently identified key issues with the use of the funding. You and your leaders have recognised the reasons why disadvantaged pupils are not achieving as well as they should, and leaders responsible for this area have a secure understanding of strategies to enable greater progress. However, little impact has been seen thus far.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new appointments in the leadership team continue to build on the improvements recently made
- the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good so that pupils make strong progress in all subjects, particularly mathematics and science
- the rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils improve
- the rates of progress of the most able pupils improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Warner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and several members of your senior leadership team, the coordinator for most-able pupils, the chair of the trust, the chief executive officer and middle leaders.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the pupil premium plan and minutes of the governing body's meetings. Inspectors checked records relating to safeguarding. Inspectors visited classes on learning walks, including with senior leaders, and checked pupils' progress in their books.

Inspectors considered the 291 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took into consideration responses from 51 pupils and 42 staff to their online questionnaires, including the free-text responses.