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26 September 2018

Mr Mark Christian  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Christian

### **Short inspection of Woolton High School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 September 2018 with Will Smith, Her Majesty's 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 November 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and other leaders, including governors, know the school well. Since the last inspection, you have successfully overseen significant changes, with the closure of the boarding provision and the admission of girls to the school.

You and your staff care deeply about the pupils you work with. Staff have a detailed understanding of every pupil's needs. They work closely with parents and carers and 'go the extra mile' to help pupils overcome the barriers to learning that they face. This caring ethos is reflected in the warm relationships that pupils enjoy with staff. Pupils feel respected and, in turn, they behave well and approach their studies with a positive attitude. Parents appreciate the lengths that your staff go to in order to support their children. Typical comments from parents include: 'at last, a school that recognises my child's needs' and 'amazing school, brilliant teachers'.

You have an exceptionally enthusiastic and committed staff team. You have ensured that your staff are reflective and keen to improve the school further. Your staff share a clear understanding of the purpose of the school, which has at its heart a strong desire to prepare pupils for the next stage in their education. The governors and local authority share your unswerving commitment to this vision and appreciate the improvements that have been made to the school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to increase vocational and work-based opportunities for pupils. You have done this very effectively by introducing a broad range of optional vocational courses such as cycle maintenance, painting and decorating, and catering. Teaching of this part of the curriculum closely matches pupils' needs and is extremely purposeful. All vocational courses that pupils study lead to useful qualifications and clear paths to college and employment. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils successfully transferring to education, employment and training once they leave Woolton. The success of this approach is also recognised by pupils, with comments from them including: 'I've got a better chance of getting a job' and 'Now I feel I've got a chance.'

Inspectors also asked you to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You and the leadership team have successfully strengthened the quality of teaching across the school. Teaching is well matched to pupils' needs and teachers are increasingly skilled in using assessment to determine the gaps that pupils have in their learning. Moreover, the improvements that have been made to assessment have ensured that pupils understand what they know and can do, as well as what they need to do to improve their learning further.

You and the leadership team have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. You are ambitious for the school and its continued improvement. You recognise that attendance is too low for some pupils. Furthermore, you appreciate the need to further develop the curriculum so that it delivers an even broader educational experience for your pupils. You have also identified the need to build upon the improvements that have already been made to the teaching of literacy across the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given high priority by all staff. Your safeguarding leaders have created a culture that places safeguarding at the heart of the school's work. You and your team have ensured that staff take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously and are hyper-vigilant to changes in pupils' behaviour, mood or demeanour. The staff share an exceptionally nuanced understanding of the safeguarding risks that are potentially more prevalent within the school's context. Furthermore, staff go the extra mile to mitigate against these heightened risks.

You are very alert to the safeguarding implications of high absence and have robust systems in place to chase up absence and ascertain pupils' whereabouts. Furthermore, you enjoy highly effective relationships with external agencies which play a key role in keeping the vulnerable pupils in your care safe. You work closely with agencies such as the youth offending team, the education welfare service and the school nursing team to spot signs of abuse or neglect quickly and take appropriate action.

The leadership team's approach to promoting e-safety is thorough and far-reaching. Pupils' internet usage at school is closely monitored and pupils are taught how to stay safe online. You also enlist the help of parents and carers to keep pupils safe online.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these was the attendance of pupils. Attendance has been low and decreasing for several years. It is clear that you have a good understanding of the reasons for this decline. In particular, the dissolution of the boarding provision and the increasing proportion of pupils with acute and complex needs has led to a decline in overall attendance and an increase in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.
- We found that you and the leaders responsible for attendance work hard to challenge poor attendance. Your team also uses creative strategies to encourage regular attendance. For example, you have introduced financial incentives for regular attendance. In addition, you work collaboratively and creatively with a range of partners, including the education welfare service and youth offending team, to improve the attendance of individual pupils. As a result, the school has been able to support a significant number of pupils to improve their attendance since joining the school. You have also introduced 'engagement classrooms' to provide support for pupils with complex needs. This has resulted in improved attendance for these pupils because the education that they now receive caters effectively for their needs. However, the attendance of pupils who learn through alternative provision is still very low and overall absence remains too high.
- A second line of enquiry focused on the curriculum. You have a clear rationale for the curriculum, which is intended to prepare pupils to move successfully to an appropriate destination when they leave the school. The development of the vocational programmes has proved very effective and it has been instrumental in helping you to realise your aims for the curriculum. School data shows that the vast majority of pupils were successful in sustaining a place in employment, education or training during the last academic year. This represents a significant improvement and the culmination of a positive trend that started with the expansion of your vocational curriculum offer.
- However, other aspects of the curriculum have not received as much attention. In particular, pupils have only sporadic opportunities to learn about the arts. The humanities, when taught, are valued by pupils. For example, a number of pupils told inspectors that some of their most important learning took place when they learned about slavery as part of a history topic. Furthermore, other pupils expressed a desire to learn more about subjects such as art and geography. Your staff told inspectors how much they feel that pupils would benefit from an even broader and richer academic curriculum to complement the excellent vocational curriculum that has been established.

- We also looked at how effectively the curriculum supports the development of pupils' literacy skills. You are acutely aware that, in the past, pupils have not made as much progress in English as they have in mathematics. As a result, you have introduced a number of strategies to boost the progress that pupils make in English. For example, you have prioritised the development of pupils' spelling and have done a great deal to encourage reading for pleasure. As a consequence of these actions, school information shows that pupils' progress in English has been at least as strong as in mathematics over the last two years. This indicates that the gap in progress between mathematics and English in school has reduced. However, these improvements have not led to pupils performing better in external examinations. Information in the public domain indicates that pupils are still making significantly more progress in mathematics than English during their time at the school.
- Finally, we looked at how well your school supports children looked after to make strong progress. The school has a high proportion of pupils who are looked after. The local authority recognises the important role your school plays in supporting some of the city's most vulnerable pupils. The school's work with children looked after is recognised as highly effective. The school has a positive impact on the behaviour, personal development, mental health and life chances of these vulnerable children. Your staff are ambitious for these pupils and children looked after make strong progress in many ways during their time at your school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- increase the impact of the school's strategies for reducing rates of absence, particularly among those who attend alternative provision
- build upon the excellent work that has been undertaken to develop the vocational curriculum by extending pupils' learning further in the arts and humanities
- accelerate pupils' progress in English by developing their literacy skills in a range of subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. We also met with members of the governing body and the school's improvement partner, who also represented the local authority. We met formally with a group of pupils and talked informally with others around the school. We also had a formal meeting with a group of staff.

You accompanied us on visits to classes where we observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects. We also looked at work produced by pupils throughout the school in English and mathematics.

We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. We also scrutinised a range of policies, the school improvement plan and self-evaluation report. Inspectors also reviewed the school's website.

Inspectors considered two comments from parents received by Ofsted's free-text facility. There were not enough responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, to be significant. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff or pupil questionnaires.