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Mr Matthew Hardwick
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hardwick

Short inspection of Ulverston Victoria High School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2018 with Neil Mackenzie, HMI, and Philip Wood, 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 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. Your school offers a wealth of opportunities for pupils. The curriculum is laden with opportunities to develop music, sport and art. Outside of lessons, pupils can learn to play chess, crochet and knit, learn self-defence, orienteering, dance and climb.

Pupils are rightly proud of their many accolades, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award. There is a strong focus on equalities, with a wide range of sports available to girls and boys. One parent commented: 'This is a brilliant school with a fantastic acting head. All concerns I've had have been dealt with immediately and effectively. My children are very happy here.'

Your school is known for its musical prowess. There is a chamber choir, swing band, junior flute choir and whole-school choir. The 'little big band' have performed across Europe. Pupils are encouraged to be innovative and think nothing of writing, directing and performing their own pantomime which is a 'mash-up' of well-known stories, for example 'The Ruby Slipper'.

Leaders and managers have high standards and expectations of themselves and others; these are reflected in challenging targets for pupils' achievement. As a result, pupils typically make good progress, and the most able pupils make rapid progress.

Typically, high-quality teaching promotes good progress. Pupils glean a strong understanding of technical language and facts due to teachers' sophisticated subject expertise. Teachers regularly check, through precise questioning, how well pupils have understood and then adjust their teaching appropriately.

Pupils achieve well across the curriculum. In 2018, the school's results were strong for pupils achieving a grade 5+ in English, mathematics, science, law, French, German, art, textiles, drama and music.

The difference between the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and their peers has diminished year-on-year since the previous inspection. The rate of improvement in this area has plateaued and disadvantaged pupils' progress lags behind that of other pupils nationally. This remains an area of focus for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding systems are fit for purpose. The single central record meets requirements. All staff have regular child protection training. You provide a weekly safeguarding briefing and have provided supplementary training for staff on a range of topics, including the risks of pupils' potential involvement in drug networks. Child protection records are kept securely. You have a good understanding of the relevance of the 'Prevent' duty in your community. Your work is very detailed and thorough.

Almost all parents who responded to Parent View felt that their children are safe in school, a view that is mirrored by pupils. A very small minority of pupils and parents who responded to the Ofsted survey felt that bullying is not dealt with effectively. All reported incidents of bullying are dealt with and the outcomes are carefully logged. The school is currently reviewing its policies, in order to make it clearer to parents and pupils the many ways that they can report any concerns.

Inspection findings

- While the progress of disadvantaged pupils has followed an improving trend over the past few years, it is not consistently good. This is the top priority in your school improvement plan. While you have made inroads into improving outcomes for this group, you do not fully evaluate the impact of pupil premium spending. This prevents leaders and managers from accurately identifying where interventions have had a positive impact and where money has not been well spent.
- Pupils achieve well across a range of subjects. The most able pupils benefit from a highly challenging curriculum. The proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 and above in mathematics and English is well above the national average. Pupils make exceptional progress in science. Almost all the pupils entered for the triple science award achieved a grade 5 and above; two thirds of the cohort in chemistry achieved a grade 8 and above.
- Most middle-ability pupils make good progress. The proportion of them achieving a grade 5 and above in English and mathematics is in line with the national average.

However, this group of pupils do not make the strong progress of which they are capable because the curriculum does not consistently provide the necessary stretch and challenge.

- Teaching typically challenges pupils and this leads to good progress. In a Year 8 German class, pupils were observed making strong progress enriching their writing with qualifiers. Pupils were keen to answer questions and show a thirst for learning. Similarly, in a Year 9 history lesson, pupils were learning about World War I. They were encouraged to think deeply about the implications of the war and to understand what was meant by the 'Scramble for Africa'.
- The sixth form is the culmination of a rich and engaging curriculum. Over half of pupils achieve A* to B grades. Pupils benefit from highly specialised teaching and consequently make strong progress, with many of them going on to university.
- Teaching is effective. For example, in a Year 13 mathematics class, the teacher shared their expert knowledge and learners effectively consolidated their understanding. Some well-thought-out questions from learners indicated good prior knowledge and strong academic curiosity.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to all pupils nationally improves
- the curriculum for middle-ability pupils allows them to make even stronger progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, and a member of the team spoke to a representative from the local authority. I also met with members of the governing body. I spoke with a range of pupils. We scrutinised a range of workbooks across a variety of subjects and year groups. I looked at the school's website and analysed the school self-evaluation and school improvement plan. We analysed the school's record of checks made on the suitability of staff and records of child protection and staff training. We also discussed other aspects of safeguarding with you. We considered 184 free-text responses and 196 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I considered 68 responses to the staff questionnaire.