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Mr P Higham
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Higham

Short inspection of Great Arley School

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 2018 with Linda Griffiths, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you joined the school as headteacher in 2016, you have worked with the governing body to shape your vision and direction for the school. You acted quickly to create a culture of shared ownership and belonging. Every member of the school community works together to strive for continuous improvement. You have strengthened the curriculum and this has had a positive impact on pupils' learning. Staff now spend more time with their tutor group teaching the core lessons, and they know pupils' needs well. Consequently, pupils make strong progress towards their academic and personal targets.

Positive relationships are the foundation of the school. Pupils are happy and thrive. Their enthusiasm for learning and their love of school shines through. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and are happy that they chose Great Arley. One parent summed it up by saying, 'We are lucky as parents to have a school like this.' Another parent echoed many other comments by saying, 'A happy child will learn.'

In response to the previous inspection, new assessment systems have been introduced to monitor the progress of pupils more closely. This information is used well by you and other school leaders to spot any variation between the progress of groups of pupils and monitor the learning of individuals. Governors analyse this information and, as a result, they know the school well. Governors hold leaders firmly

to account. School leaders act quickly to plan interventions and support for pupils who fall behind. For example, in mathematics, teachers are now able to identify more effectively any gaps in pupils' understanding of number and measurement skills. Appropriate strategies to address these gaps are then swiftly put into place.

You have also worked with the senior leadership team to maintain the good quality of teaching across the school. Subject leaders are now in place and are leading improvements in their areas of responsibility. Staff have time to research good practice and to share their findings. The improvements that staff have implemented are clear to see. For example, sensory resources are used to support each pupil's specific needs, leading to calmer and more productive learning environments. Training has focused on the use of effective questioning techniques that enable staff to challenge pupils to think for themselves and to make connections between topics and concepts. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to lessons and are deployed purposefully to promote and expand pupils' learning.

Many pupils arrive at school with limited academic skills as well as poor social and emotional skills. Through challenging yet supportive teaching, pupils make good progress from these low starting points. However, in a small minority of instances, tasks do not match pupils' abilities closely enough. In these cases, pupils' learning is less effective.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong and effective culture of safeguarding in the school. Governors take an active role and work closely with you and other leaders to ensure that all systems and procedures are fit for purpose and that all pupils are safe.

You have strengthened and expanded the safeguarding team. This has resulted in rapid access to direct support for more pupils and their families. Staff know the pupils well and are very vigilant. The high staff-to-pupil ratio ensures that pupils are well cared for and their needs are met.

Most pupils arrive and leave the school by taxi. This is a well-managed, meticulous and highly supervised procedure which keeps pupils safe and secure.

Inspection findings

- One of the areas I explored with you during the inspection was whether most pupils make good or better academic progress during their time in your school. The school's assessment systems are a valuable tool which enable you and other leaders to evaluate information about pupils' progress accurately. Where small gaps exist between the progress of groups of pupils, you take decisive action to ensure that these are closed. Consequently, there is very little difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. The school's own assessment information and the records of pupils' work in a wide range of subjects show that pupils make good progress overall from their starting points. However, occasionally work is not well matched to pupils' needs, which at times leads to their progress faltering.

- We also explored the progress that pupils make in their personal, social and emotional development. The development of life skills, social skills, communication, speech and language are threaded throughout the curriculum. Personal development skills are also incorporated into the school's wider curriculum and the many positive experiences that pupils enjoy. For example, pupils take part in horticulture, the choir, swimming and sport. Weekly assemblies celebrate pupils' achievements and provide an opportunity to sing and enjoy music together. Collectively, these experiences enable pupils to make good progress in their personal development.
- I was also interested in how well your school prepares pupils for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Pupils leave Great Arley at the end of key stage 4 well prepared for the next phase of their education. Pupils start to look at option choices as early as Year 8 and the school promotes choice through a full programme of careers information, advice and guidance. The well-established links with local colleges and other providers allow a seamless transition to post-16 provision. Pupils benefit from taster day visits and experience a range of linked college courses throughout Years 10 and 11. These experiences allow pupils to make informed choices about their future. Staff from post-16 providers are involved in annual reviews early enough to ensure that transition plans are secure. As a result, all pupils who left the school in 2018 progressed to a post-16 provision.
- Another area I explored with you was how effective school planning is in securing future improvements. You and the governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and where developments are needed. Your action plans are focused and detailed. This allows leaders at all levels to measure effectively the impact of any actions.
- My final line of enquiry concerned the persistent absence of some pupils. This has been addressed successfully and, as a result, persistent absence has reduced and is now below the national average. Staff work with families and pupils to remove barriers to attendance and, in some cases, the attendance of individual pupils has improved dramatically.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen teaching further by tackling the few instances where teachers do not match tasks well enough to pupils' needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Bather
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and senior leaders. Inspectors held a meeting with seven members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of Lancashire local authority. Inspectors met with the member of staff who leads on safeguarding and scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the single central record. Learning walks were undertaken and pupils' books, education, health and care plans and individual education plans were scrutinised.

The 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account and inspectors met with one parent. They also took account of the 29 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, spoke to staff during the day and met with a small group of staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils and met with the student council. They also took account of the 62 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. They observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Documents were scrutinised including information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; records of pupils' attendance; and information relating to the work of the governing body.