

6 December 2018

Mr Nick Ellery
Headteacher
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Wetheriggs Lane
Penrith
Cumbria
CA11 8NG

Dear Mr Ellery

Short inspection of Ullswater Community College

Following my visit to the school on 27 November 2018 with Alison Stott and Paul Edmondson, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 February 2014.

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.**

Having been the deputy headteacher before taking up the post of interim and then permanent headteacher, you have a clear understanding of the school's position and the areas that require improvement. Once in post, your top priority was, quite rightly, to address the issues relating to site safety. More recently, you have taken action to improve the curriculum and the way that you support disadvantaged pupils. However, it is too early to know the impact of these actions.

The school is in a period of leadership transition. Several senior leaders, although not new to the school, have taken on different responsibilities. Like you, they are relishing these new roles, but there has not been enough time to see the impact of their actions. In the key areas of the curriculum and disadvantaged pupils' achievement, older pupils are still affected by the legacy of previous leadership decisions.

Under your leadership, the school has become more outward-facing. You are keen to take advantage of external support, for example from the local authority, to help you to move the school forward. Your honest and open style of leadership is valued by staff. Responses to the staff online questionnaire were very positive. A very high proportion of the respondents said that they feel supported and are proud to be a

member of staff at the school.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Of the very high number of those who responded to Parent View, 99% would recommend the school to another parent. Many parents took the time to respond to the free-text section of the questionnaire. The vast majority of these comments were favourable. Parents value the support that staff give to their children. They particularly praise your commitment to supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The very caring and nurturing ethos is a notable strength of the school. Staff are responsive to pupils' needs, particularly those who are vulnerable. Pupils value the help and support that they receive from their teachers. Pupils and parents speak highly of the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are available. These include sports and music activities and trips, both in this country and abroad.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding. There was a particular focus on ensuring that teaching stretched pupils' thinking, pushing them to do their best, particularly the most able. While strong teaching does exist, this is not consistent across the school. This means that not all pupils benefit from routinely high-quality teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

You were acutely aware of the need to take urgent action in response to the concerns about site safety that were identified in the monitoring inspection that took place in September 2016. You described this as your 'number one priority' on taking up your post as headteacher. You have taken practical measures to prevent the public from accessing the school building, apart from via the main reception. During the school day, the site is closed to vehicles. All risk assessments and health and safety procedures related to site safety are now fit for purpose. Alongside these practical measures, you have worked sensitively to engage with pupils, parents and the local community to change the culture in relation to site security.

Over the past year, new leadership has improved the safeguarding culture throughout the school. There is now an understanding that safeguarding is the responsibility of everybody in school, not just the pastoral staff. The training that staff receive means that they are well placed to spot any signs of pupils being potentially at risk. Records of who has completed training are in place for the past two years. However, at the time of the inspection, this was not the case for the current academic year. Senior leaders are aware of this and are in the process of updating this information.

Leaders have strong links with relevant external agencies to ensure that they can provide the right support for pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable. The pastoral curriculum has a strong focus on making sure that pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. Relevant outside speakers are frequently invited into school to talk to pupils.

The single central record covers all relevant staff and includes all the required checks. However, during the inspection, a check on recruitment documentation revealed some concerns about how rigorously references had been sought when appointing non-teaching staff. Two randomly selected examples revealed either no references or nothing recorded on file. These appointments were made prior to the new leadership.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry related to pupils' attendance. Since the last inspection, the overall absence rate had been in line with the national average until 2017, when it increased. Of more concern was the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils who had poor attendance. The figures for 2018 show that the overall absence rate and the absence rate for disadvantaged pupils saw further slight increases. The current overall absence rate has decreased and is now in line with the national average again. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils still gives cause for concern. The attendance team works closely with individual disadvantaged pupils and their families. This includes phone calls and visits to pupils' homes and working with external agencies. The attendance team provided inspectors with details of case studies showing the positive impact of their actions on the attendance rate of individual pupils. This intensive work means that the number of disadvantaged pupils who are currently persistently absent from school has significantly reduced. Nevertheless, too many disadvantaged pupils still have a high absence rate. Poor attendance had a significant negative impact on disadvantaged pupils' achievement last year. Ensuring that this does not happen again this year is a high priority for leaders.
- In 2017 and 2018, the proportion of pupils who were entered for the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was much lower than the national average. In 2017, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were entered was as low as 3%. I was interested to discuss with you the rationale behind your curriculum and whether it was enabling all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to make the best possible progress and fulfil their academic potential. You explained that the low EBacc entries were related to curriculum decisions that were taken under the previous leadership. The legacy of these decisions means that these numbers will remain low for the current Year 11 and, to a lesser extent, Year 10. You have made changes to the curriculum. Indications are that approximately 25% of the current Year 9 have opted to study the full suite of EBacc subjects. You are proud of the wide range of vocational and creative courses that are available for pupils. You believe that these courses lead to strong engagement in learning and are particularly appropriate for the geographical context of your school. During the inspection, we discussed the challenge of maintaining the breadth of your unique vocational curriculum while ensuring that all pupils are encouraged to fulfil their academic potential.
- In the past three years, pupils who left school made broadly average progress during their time at Ullswater Community College. However, this was not the case for disadvantaged pupils. Their progress in 2018 was particularly concerning, as it showed that they achieved nearly a grade lower across their subjects than other pupils nationally with the same starting points. I was keen to

explore with you how leaders are ensuring that high-quality teaching enables all pupils, but particularly those who are disadvantaged, to make good progress and achieve high standards across a range of subjects. While many pupils are benefiting from routinely strong teaching, there is some variability, both within and but particularly between subjects. This was evident when inspectors carried out a scrutiny of some pupils' work. It was clear that not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, which has an impact on the quality of pupils' work. We discussed the reasons why in recent years, pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, have not made strong progress in science, modern foreign languages and humanities. Where you identified issues with the quality of teaching and subject leadership, you have taken action. A significant number of subject leaders are new in post. You and other senior leaders are working closely with them to bring about improvements in their respective areas.

- You have introduced a new whole-school strategy to support disadvantaged pupils. You described the previous approach as 'an intervention-based model' which has not been effective in helping these pupils to overcome barriers to learning. From this September, all disadvantaged pupils have had their own mentor and personalised support plan. At the centre of this new strategy is a focus on how these pupils are routinely supported and challenged in the classroom. You trialled this model last year with small groups of identified pupils, for example the most able in English. You were able to demonstrate to me the impact of these trials. You describe this new approach as 'in its infancy', so it is too early to see the impact on disadvantaged pupils across the school.
- My final line of enquiry was to investigate whether students are making good progress during their time in the sixth form. In 2017, students made average progress in their A levels, but below average progress in vocational courses. In 2018, students again made average progress in their A level subjects. Students' progress in vocational courses was much improved and is now above average. Students spoke very positively about their experience in the sixth form. They value the breadth of courses on offer, the quality of teaching and the advice and guidance about post-18 options. They spoke very highly of the support that they receive, which they feel is timely and personalised to meet their needs. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas that require improvement in the sixth form. One of their priorities for improvement is to ensure that the most able students attain the high grades of which they are capable. Leaders are also working to increase the proportion of disadvantaged students who stay on into the sixth form.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the attendance rate of disadvantaged pupils
- the new whole-school approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils enables them to make the best possible progress and attain well across a wide range of subjects

- the curriculum enables all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to make the best possible progress and fulfil their academic potential
- all pupils benefit from routinely high-quality teaching, and that all teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve
- they tighten up procedures in relation to keeping up-to-date records of staff safeguarding training and making sure that references are always sought and kept in the appropriate personnel files.

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

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and other senior leaders. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair and vice chair. I also spoke on the phone with a local authority representative. Inspectors met formally with three groups of pupils and talked informally with others in lessons and during morning break.

Accompanied by senior leaders, inspectors observed teaching and learning, focusing particularly on science, modern foreign languages and humanities. Together with senior leaders, they scrutinised the work of a small group of pupils. Inspectors examined a range of documents, including your self-evaluation. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, inspectors considered the 418 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 140 free-text comments. They also considered the 72 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the 199 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.