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Mr Andy Cunningham
The Lakes School
Troutbeck Bridge
Windermere
Cumbria
LA23 1HW

Dear Mr Cunningham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Lakes School

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- review and refine current initiatives to improve pupils' attendance further, especially that of disadvantaged pupils
- improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils across the school
- increase the level of challenge in lessons so that pupils are stretched to achieve their potential
- improve pupils' ability to write at length.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to a representative of the local authority and the South Lakes Federation (SLF) on the telephone. I spoke formally with a group of Year 10 and 11 pupils. Together, you and I visited a range of lessons and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work. I took account of documents provided by senior leaders and evaluated the school improvement plan. I reviewed the school's safeguarding policies and checked the single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have strengthened leadership capacity. New appointments to the extended leadership team include one leader for teaching and learning and two pupil premium champions. You have also appointed a new head of English. In total, six members of staff have left the school and five have joined.

Main findings

You, together with your staff team and governors, demonstrate a shared determination to raise standards in the school. You have a clear vision for improving pupils' academic and personal development. You have benefited from working with leaders in the SLF and this has improved your leadership of the school. You have sharpened school improvement planning and increased the level of accountability for leaders. You provided me with clear evidence of the actions that leaders have taken and the positive impact that these have had on pupils' progress. Your self-evaluation is honest and accurate.

Middle leaders have responded well to support and training from the local authority adviser and the SLF. Middle leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas more effectively than in the past. They ensure that assessments are accurate by using internal moderation and consultation with schools within the SLF. Leaders check pupils' progress regularly. This enables them to identify where pupils are at risk of falling behind and provide extra support.

Your training for staff has improved the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Most teachers use assessment information well to plan work that is matched to pupils' abilities. Pupils are responding well to the higher expectations that teachers now have of them. Where learning is effective, teachers use their strong subject knowledge alongside skilful questioning to probe and develop pupils' understanding. You and your leaders have made changes to the curriculum and schemes of work to meet the needs and interests of pupils. However, you recognise that pupils, including the most able and boys, need to be challenged more to achieve their potential. Teachers consistently apply the school's new feedback policy. Our review of pupils' books shows that they are now being provided with

opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects. However, you acknowledge that there is further work to do here.

The improvements in teaching are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Provisional results for 2018 indicate that Year 11 pupils made broadly average progress across a range of subjects. This is an improvement on the published results for 2017. In the sixth form, progress in academic subjects was below the national average in 2017. You implemented a range of strategies to improve achievement in the sixth form. As a result, provisional examination results in 2018, and inspection evidence, show that students' progress is now good overall.

The small number of disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 did not do well in 2018. You and your team have carefully analysed the reasons for this because you are committed to removing the barriers for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have improved the monitoring and evaluation of the progress of disadvantaged pupils. In addition, you have recently appointed two pupil premium champions to lead on sharing good practice and to raise the aspirations of these pupils. A review of their work and current assessment information shows that the differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are diminishing. However, you are aware that more needs to be done to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make even better progress across subjects and year groups.

Your attendance team is working hard to reduce the number of absences, which have been too high in the past. The number of pupils missing learning as a result of holidays taken during term time continues to remain a concern. You have employed a full-time attendance officer who works closely with parents and carers to follow up pupils' absences. Leaders reward pupils for coming to school regularly and have had some success with improving rates of attendance of individual pupils. However, the attendance of pupils overall, and including disadvantaged pupils, needs to improve further.

Governors have a passionate commitment to the school. They have received effective support from the local authority adviser. For example, governors welcome the training that they have received on school performance data. This enables them to monitor and evaluate progress on the school's improvement priorities more closely. As a result, they know the school well. Governors provide effective support and challenge to senior and middle leaders through regular meetings with them.

The school is a calm and orderly environment. I could see that pupils behave well in lessons, at breaktimes and around the school. The relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Pupils I spoke to said that safeguarding procedures and teaching have improved since the last inspection.

External support

The local authority knows the school well and is providing leaders and governors with effective support and challenge. The SLF has contributed to improvements in leadership and teaching and has therefore provided effective support.

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

Ahmed Marikar

Her Majesty's Inspector