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15 January 2019

Mr Martin Campbell
Principal
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Dear Mr Campbell

Short inspection of North Cambridge Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2018 with Lynn Ayling, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection because the school's leadership team has worked tirelessly to ensure a good quality of education for young people at the school. Staff know pupils well and most pupils settle well when they arrive at the school because routines are well established, and expectations are clear. In discussion with inspectors, pupils confirmed that the school's 'pledges' are at the heart of what makes your school unique.

The school's focus on improving feedback to pupils about what their next steps in learning should be has helped pupils to make more rapid progress. In most subjects, pupils now know what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils said that teachers give them time to make improvements and that this helps them to learn better.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. For example, the trust recently carried out a thorough safeguarding audit of the school's policies and practice. During the inspection, inspectors found strong evidence that the findings of the audit matched what they saw.

The culture of safeguarding at North Cambridge Academy is embedded in policies, practice and training for staff. Pupils at the school said that they feel safe and they reported that they could talk to any member of staff if they had a concern. The

school has a strong record of working with outside stakeholders to ensure that pupils are safe.

Inspection findings

- In order to ascertain whether the school remains good, inspectors followed a number of lines of enquiry. Firstly, we considered how effectively the pupil premium grant is used to support disadvantaged pupils so that they make good progress over time. North Cambridge Academy (NCA) has adopted a 'holistic' approach to giving disadvantaged young people opportunities and experiences throughout their time at the school. For example, in addition to a wide range of clubs and trips, you provide 'Saturday school' enrichment sessions in dance and drama. You encourage younger pupils to take part in '99 things to do before you are 12 and three-quarters', to broaden their life experience and learn to take risks. Pupils and families value these opportunities. In key stage 4, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are expected to attend intervention sessions to help them embed their learning. Some pupils find this approach too prescriptive, but the majority say that it helps them to revise and prepare well for examinations.
- Pupils' progress and attainment in GCSE science and mathematics have improved since the last inspection. In these subjects, most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress. This is because learning is well planned. Pupils said that they quickly grasped the purpose of learning activities in these subjects because teachers use visual resources and provide models for pupils to follow. The school has introduced a 'mastery programme' to encourage pupils, particularly the most able, to investigate and explain their learning in greater depth. This work is developing in English, mathematics and science. However, inspectors found that the most able are not challenged in all subjects.
- As another line of enquiry, inspectors investigated whether pupils' attendance is improving. Evidence provided by the school showed that pupils now attend school more regularly than they did three years ago. The school works closely with children, their families and outside agencies to provide support for pupils to arrive at school on time and attend all lessons. Pupils understand the connection between attendance and learning well. As a result, the number of pupils who attend school every day is increasing and these young people are proud of receiving special rewards for 100% attendance.
- The school's work with pupils who are persistently absent is making a difference. Over the past three years, the number of pupils with poor attendance has decreased significantly. All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have individual conversations with their tutors when they return to school after a period of absence. This helps to settle pupils back into school quickly.
- Inspectors also looked at the related issue of how the school encourages pupils to behave well in lessons and as they move around the school. Pupils in key stage 4 showed maturity and focus on learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11. School staff know pupils extremely well. Leaders' knowledge of the local context has helped them to develop strategies to promote good learning behaviours.

Pupils understand the school's expectations and older pupils in particular take responsibility for their behaviour. They told inspectors that behaviour in lessons has improved because most teachers know how to plan engaging learning activities. Pupils whose behaviour is the most challenging are carefully mentored and supported. Leaders work closely with families and other stakeholders to develop individual behaviour plans and ensure that these children remain in full-time education.

- Thirdly, inspectors considered how effectively school leaders have improved the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects. Staff are supportive of your vision and they feel valued for their professionalism. They are clear about their purpose in serving the children of the local community. Teachers currently working at the school feel part of a team. They like working at NCA because they receive support to develop their professional skills. Staff regularly work together to investigate and plan teaching strategies to help pupils make good progress. Teachers said that the small size of the school is an advantage because 'we talk to each other'.
- Staff at your school also benefit from the close working relationship with a neighbouring school in the trust. For example, the heads of mathematics and science work in two schools, which makes sharing of good practice easy. Because both schools use the same learning plans and assessments, teachers regularly work together to check the accuracy of their judgements about pupils' learning. Your organisation of departments in the school and with a partner school means that North Cambridge Academy is poised to generate improvement and share good practice in most subjects.
- Lastly, inspectors considered how effectively the school's curriculum meets the needs of the young people it serves. School leaders evaluate the school's strengths and areas for development well. You are aware that provision is less strong in some subjects, such as modern foreign languages, and this has an impact on pupils' outcomes in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). You rightly acknowledge that the improvements to teaching and pupils' progress in some subjects must now be reflected in other areas, particularly in history, art and modern foreign languages. Although you are working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in EBacc subjects other than English and mathematics, this comes too late to make a difference to Year 11 pupils currently in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The school's 'mastery programme' is further developed and embedded, so that:
 - pupils are challenged in all curriculum subjects, including EBacc subjects
 - the most able pupils make consistently strong progress because they ask questions, analyse information and explain their learning.

I am copying this letter to the academy council, the chief executive officer of the

Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Carpenter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection started with your self-evaluation of the school's performance. We agreed the lines of enquiry that the inspectors would follow during the inspection.

Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation, including current assessment information, a pupil premium spending report, safeguarding case studies and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors visited lessons, looked at work and had discussions with pupils. Other meetings were held with the principal, vice-principal, assistant principals, the special educational needs coordinator and the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector spoke to the chair and other members of the academy council, the chief executive officer of Cambridge Meridian Trust, and the local authority's director of education.

In addition, inspectors considered a recent staff survey carried out by the school. Inspectors also took into account 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil surveys.