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Mrs Christine Mitchell
Headteacher
Larches High School
Moor Park
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Short inspection of Larches High School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019 with Claire Cropper, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have only been headteacher at the school since September 2018; however, it is clear to everyone that your strong, decisive leadership is already having a very positive influence on further improving Larches High. You have high expectations and lead by example. You are ably assisted by an assured, enthusiastic leadership team. Together with staff, you make a positive difference to pupils' attitudes to learning and renew their belief in themselves and their future.

There is a shared sense of passion for ensuring that pupils receive another chance at educational success. You have created an environment of care and nurture through the whole school community. Together with staff, parents and pupils, you are rightly proud of being part of Larches High. You break down barriers to learning and create an environment where pupils feel secure and are able to re-engage in their learning.

Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors were very positive about the school. They offered sentiments such as: 'Staff go above and beyond', 'They know our child really well.' Parents also felt that you don't just care about their child, but you care about and support the families also. Parents feel their children are happy and settled.

The very large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire enjoy being part of the team at Larches High. They feel that it is well led and managed and appreciate the opportunities they have for training and development. Staff share your aspirations for pupils and feel part of the improvement journey of the school. There is a positive sense of the staff team working to do its best for pupils.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors asked you to improve and refine the ways you monitor the achievements of pupils, so that teachers are able to respond quickly if pupils begin to struggle. They also asked you to ensure that teachers take the prior learning of pupils into account in order to closely match their learning needs to the activities teachers plan. These have been fully addressed. You have set up a comprehensive system to monitor the progress of pupils in a range of subjects. You have high expectations of what pupils will achieve while they are in your care. The regular checks on pupils' learning mean that you are quick to pick up on any pupils that might be finding learning difficult. You offer a comprehensive range of interventions to support pupils to get back on track. You carefully consider pupils' prior learning as they start the school. You gather helpful information on each pupil and assess their skills and knowledge in a range of areas, including reading, writing and mathematics. You also take account of their emotional and behavioural development. Teachers use this assessment information effectively to plan for pupils' individual needs and their next steps in learning. Leaders and the management committee have a clear picture of the progress of pupils over time in subjects including English and mathematics. However, information is not gathered and used as effectively to gain an overview of the behavioural and emotional development of pupils over time.

Inspectors also asked you to ensure that full-time education places are offered to all pupils that require it. This has been fully addressed. Some pupils are still dual registered or have part-time places. For this small number of pupils, this is the most appropriate way for them to access education. Leaders review this regularly and are always seeking to secure the provision that is most beneficial to each individual pupil. However, the vast majority of pupils are registered full-time at the school.

Finally, inspectors asked you to increase the number of pupils regularly attending school. Improving an individual pupil's attendance is a high priority. To this end, you have set up an effective attendance team. There are good systems for monitoring absence. Compared to their absence in their previous school, many pupils' attendance has greatly improved. Pupils who have been persistently absent have been given appropriate support. There are some notable successes in improving their attendance. However, overall the school's attendance is still well below national averages and the number of pupils persistently absent is still too high.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given a high priority and are a strength. You and the staff team have ensured that pupils are in a safe and secure environment by promoting the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's

responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and are reviewed regularly to ensure that they meet statutory requirements and are fit for purpose. Staff and the management committee undertake appropriate up-to-date training. This includes training about keeping pupils safe from radicalisation, extremism and child sexual exploitation.

You and the pastoral team offer a high standard of vigilance and support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have very effective relationships with external agencies, including other local schools. You are strong advocates for pupils and families and make an important contribution to the safeguarding of the vulnerable pupils in your care.

Pupils said that they feel very safe and well cared for. They feel confident that adults will help them if needed. They were able to talk about the ways that they can stay safe and healthy in a range of situations, including keeping themselves safe online. Parents feel that you and the staff keep children very safe.

Inspection findings

- Pupils often start the school with knowledge and skills below those typically expected for their age. Assessment information is promptly collected by leaders. They closely track the progress of pupils to ensure that they are making as much progress as possible before they return to a mainstream school or go on to the next stage of their education. Key stage 4 pupils are expected to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics, and increasingly at GCSE. All pupils attain accreditations in functional skills and are offered an increasingly broad range of BTEC National Diploma or equivalent qualifications. The school's assessment information and pupils' workbooks clearly indicate that pupils throughout the school are making at least good progress against their individual targets. These targets are set in all subjects including English and mathematics. There is also a personal target, usually related to attendance or behavioural and emotional development. Pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- When pupils join Larches High there is an expectation that they will be reintegrated into a mainstream school as soon as possible. A pathway is agreed as soon as it is clear where a pupil will be best placed. Arrangements are thorough and thoughtfully carried out. There is good-quality transition support offered to pupils, their families and the receiving provision from the outreach team. Increasing numbers of pupils successfully return to mainstream education or other suitable provision. Schools that receive pupils are extremely complimentary about the support and liaison they are offered. Leaders would like to return more pupils to appropriate school settings and are working hard through their discussions with local secondary schools and the local authority to counter any barriers.
- Careers guidance is of an appropriate standard at key stages 3 and 4. Leaders have clear plans for further improvement in this area. Pupils value the information they receive to help them to consider their aspirations and make appropriate decisions about their futures. They are offered a consistent range of guidance. Most recently, a careers fair has been arranged at the school. Staff

have received training to ensure that careers guidance is embedded across the curriculum. Parents are happy with the support their children are given to experience success in well-matched work-based opportunities. Leaders ensure that pupils are well supported on work placements by closely checking the quality of provision. There are increased chances to study vocational subjects in school such as hair and beauty and construction. The vast majority of pupils go on to college, further training or employment.

- Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in the school. There is a weekly attendance celebration assembly, and a reward system that encourages pupils to earn vouchers for items that they value. Pupils understand the importance of coming to school each day and that being in school 'means you learn better'. Reductions in the number of pupils who are late to school are notable. This in part has been achieved by the school minibus being used to pick pupils up as they make their way to school. Leaders are rightly pleased with the improvements since September 2018 but are not complacent. They know there is more work to be done to ensure that as many pupils as possible attend school every day.
- There are a number of strengths evident at Larches High. Leaders have a strong, strategic vision and an accurate and honest view of the school. Their desire to offer the highest standards of education to pupils is shared by the management committee. Leaders are strong advocates for pupils and are not afraid to challenge the local authority and local secondary headteachers to ensure the best for pupils. The management committee's expertise, ability to challenge and passion for the success of every pupil make an important contribution towards the good practice that is evident in the school.
- High-quality relationships are the cornerstone of the school's success. Teachers and other adults have a deep knowledge of pupils. Pupils feel supported and listened to. The strong relationships that the staff build with the pupils contribute to the school providing a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils thrive and succeed. The school's relationship with parents is strong. Leaders and staff work hard and with great success to build trust and confidence with parents who are often disillusioned about education. The increasingly beneficial influence leaders have with the local authority, involvement in local authority panels, and secondary school networks, ensure that their pupils are given the very best opportunities to succeed in their future lives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- have an overview of the behaviour and emotional development of pupils
- build on the good start made improving the attendance of pupils by ensuring that as few pupils as possible are absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. We also met with members of the pastoral team including the attendance manager, the family support worker and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I met with two members of the management committee, including the chair. We had the opportunity to talk on the telephone with a local headteacher and took account of an email from another. We also spoke to a representative of an alternative provider where many Larches High pupils attend. I also spoke with the pupil referral unit network adviser who has worked with the school and a representative of the local authority. We visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. We took account of the views of parents who talked with my colleague. I also took account of the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke informally with staff. We met pupils to talk about school life. We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. We looked at school documents including: information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the work of the governance of the school; and records relating to safeguarding.