

5 April 2019

Mrs Sophy Bellis
Headteacher
Lakelands Academy
Oswestry Road
Ellesmere
Shropshire
SY12 0EA

Dear Mrs Bellis

Short inspection of Lakelands Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 2019 with Julie 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 February 2016.

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.**

Over recent years, there has been turbulence within the leadership team. This has not only affected staff morale but slowed down the speed of improvements since the previous inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in Easter 2018, you have galvanised the staff and given them a clear sense of purpose and direction. Renewed confidence is apparent in the school community. Staff talked openly and freely about their respect for your leadership and the positive changes that you and the leadership team have started. One member of staff said, 'There is now a much-improved team approach. We all feel listened to and valued.' This was reinforced in the Ofsted staff survey. Staff were positive about your consideration of their well-being.

Underperformance has been tackled without delay. Staff trust your clear vision of ensuring that pupils achieve the outcomes of which they are capable. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards their school. A warm and welcoming environment has been created, including fortnightly 'drop-ins' when parents can meet with you and/or the chair of the governing body. This is supporting the culture of transparency that is developing across the school community.

The strategies for improvement are at an early stage of implementation. The school has not fully addressed the areas for improvement following the previous

inspection. For example, as a result of the challenges that the school has experienced, the quality of teaching and learning is still variable. Leaders have a clear and a collective vision to tackle and improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress, but plans are still in their infancy. However, there have been improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils as a result of school strategies.

Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils over the last three years have been too low. Leaders are ensuring that there is a greater focus on the academic needs of these pupils.

Parents and carers are positive about the school and are grateful for the care it provides for pupils. Some of the free-text comments support the changes that have been made under your leadership. However, some parents commented on the variability in teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders take their responsibility of keeping pupils safe very seriously. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Together with your team, you have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You provide regular training and staff know how to identify pupils who need help.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children are kept safe at the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They say that incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are rare and, when they do happen, staff deal with them well.

Inspection findings

- Since your appointment as headteacher, you and the leadership team have worked tirelessly to improve standards. You have increased the capacity at middle and senior leadership levels in order to support this work. An additional member of staff has been appointed to the senior team and the pastoral team has been restructured. The newly developed quality assurance systems, and the provision for staff development, are empowering all staff, including middle leaders. Staff made direct reference to this way of working as 'Team Lakelands'. Your leadership team recognises that the school is 'on a journey' and there is more to do.
- A large focus for us was the significant underperformance of disadvantaged pupils over a sustained period of time within the school. Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Previous plans to improve outcomes for these pupils have not had the impact leaders expected. The lack of milestones in the pupil premium plan makes it very difficult to regularly evaluate the impact of planned spending. Many of the actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are still being implemented and, therefore, it is too early to evaluate the impact on the performance of these pupils.

- One of the development areas from the previous inspection was to further develop teaching and learning strategies. Various opportunities to share good practice across faculties have been created, for example through regular after-school workshops. Staff that we spoke to find this supportive and helpful. However, the full impact of this work is yet to be seen.
- Strong teaching is leading to improvements in pupils' progress. For example, in a Year 8 French lesson, pupils were using the target language with confidence. This had been developed over time. A culture of high expectations was evident in the lesson and in pupils' books. Pupils said that they felt they were always challenged in order to achieve the best they could. They were enjoying their learning.
- The quality of teaching is, however, variable. Work is not always planned to match the needs of individual pupils. This means pupils are not given the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills as quickly as they should. To address this, leaders have started to make changes to the school's quality assurance systems, through faculty reviews and 'action and impact' meetings. As a result, faculty middle leaders are more empowered and have a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas. They told us that they are finding these strategies helpful and supportive.
- Previously, option subjects within key stage 4 did not have enough teaching time within the curriculum to cover the depth of work that is required. The curriculum has now been adapted to ensure that pupils have more time in order to be fully prepared for their examinations. However, current pupils in Year 11 remain on the former curriculum.
- Some middle leaders are still adapting to changes in the new examination specifications. Subject networks with local schools are in place for some subjects but links are insufficient, particularly for leaders in small faculties, in order to provide further support.
- Governors are honest in recognising where the school needs to improve. They say that they, too, are 'on a journey'. They are clear that they have not held leaders to account sufficiently since the previous inspection, but this is now much improved. They, too, talk about a more open, honest and transparent culture and feel better placed to challenge and support school leaders. Recent minutes of governors' meetings, seen during the inspection, show that this new culture is beginning to develop.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is consistently good or better
- plans to improve the provision for disadvantaged pupils are implemented fully and their impact on the achievement of these pupils is rigorously evaluated
- recent school improvement strategies, including the changes made to the curriculum, are embedded and built upon, in order to secure improvement in the

attainment and progress of all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Gill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you and members of the senior leadership team, governors and middle leaders. We also met with a group of pupils.

We checked records relating to safeguarding and scrutinised a range of documents, including the pupil premium plan and minutes of the governing body meetings. We visited classes on learning walks with senior leaders and checked pupils' progress in their books.

We considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 28 free-text responses. We also took into consideration the 36 pupil and the 56 staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires.