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Ms Ann Webster
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Dear Ms Webster

Short inspection of Sharples School

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 2019 with Claire Hollister, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in 2017, you have left no stone unturned in your quest to ensure that every pupil is provided with the building blocks they need to help them be successful. You, together with your senior leadership team, have created a caring, inclusive learning community where pupils achieve well. Published information shows that Year 11 pupils' overall progress was higher than the national average in 2017 and 2018. Pupils' progress in science has been well above average over the last three years. Pupils also make strong progress in a range of other subjects.

The school's motto, 'learn, dream, achieve', lies at the heart of everything the school does. Pupils are polite and friendly. They wear their uniform with pride and move around the school calmly. Pupils behave well both in classrooms and at breaktimes. Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. In lessons, pupils are focused, work hard and show respect for others' opinions. They show pride in their work, which is neat and well presented. Pupils greatly appreciate the support that staff provide. They told inspectors that staff go the 'extra mile' for them to help them do their best. Pupils value the improvements you have made. They spoke very positively about the information, advice and guidance that they receive in making applications to sixth-form colleges.

Parents and carers who responded to the free-text service and Parent View,

Ofsted's online survey, were extremely positive about the school. One parent commented: 'My child is very well cared for.' Another parent said: 'There has been an improvement in the running of the school. My child is very happy here.' Almost all parents would recommend the school to another parent.

Staff who responded to Ofsted's survey and spoke with inspectors are proud to work at the school and feel that it is well led and managed. They feel valued and listened to by you and your senior leadership team.

You have your finger on the pulse of the school and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and those areas that need to be developed further. You have improved the quality of teaching, since your appointment as headteacher. Leaders provide many opportunities for teachers to share their expertise and learning, both within the school and with local school partners. You have developed new assessment systems to check the progress that pupils are making. Middle leaders discuss pupils' progress regularly with senior leaders and are held to account for the progress that they make.

Governors want the best for the school. One governor commented: 'We want pupils to fulfil their potential.' Governors come with a broad range of skills and experience which help them to challenge and support leaders effectively. Governors are well informed about what is happening in the school, through regular visits and presentations from senior and middle leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of vigilance to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders ensure that checks made on the suitability of staff to work at the school are up to date. Staff receive regular training sessions, including on how to keep pupils safe from abuse and radicalisation and extremism. Staff know what to do if they have a concern. Leaders are tenacious in following up any concerns and work well with external agencies and families to protect vulnerable pupils.

Pupils enjoy coming to the school. Overall attendance is above the national average. Attendance for pupils who are disadvantaged is improving, due to leaders working more closely with families. Pupils feel safe in the school. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet and using social media. Pupils have a strong voice. They feel that staff listen to them. As a result, pupils are confident that staff take their views seriously. Staff and parents agree that their children are safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we explored several key issues, including, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils. In recent years, disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved and was broadly in line with that of other pupils nationally

in 2018. You and your team make good use of the pupil premium funding. Leaders work effectively with staff to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support that they need. Consequently, these pupils are making strong progress across the curriculum.

- You have raised the profile of the most able pupils among the staff and introduced a range of initiatives to open up opportunities for them. Teachers have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve. Most tasks are tailored to pupils' needs and support their good progress. However, in a few classes, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged effectively. This leads to some not making the progress of which they are capable.
- Another aspect we considered was the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. You and your leaders scrutinise pupils' work and visit lessons to see how well pupils learn. Pupils' progress in these subjects has improved over time. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use questioning well to probe and develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils have many more opportunities to develop their vocabulary, write at length and read widely. Teachers ensure that pupils understand basic mathematical skills required to help them tackle more complex problem-solving tasks. Current assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that outcomes for current pupils in English and mathematics are improving strongly.
- You review the curriculum regularly to ensure that it matches pupils' aspirations and interests. You have developed a broad curriculum and have introduced a wider choice of GCSE subjects, such as photography and vocational subjects. Pupils benefit from a wealth of sports, clubs and activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. This helps them to develop their confidence and motivation. Additional activities include trips and residential visits, which contribute to their personal development. The diversity in the school is a real strength and is celebrated well. Pupils who arrive during the school year, told inspectors that staff support them 'every inch of the way'.
- We also discussed the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have taken action to improve the leadership of this area. The acting special educational needs coordinator supported by a senior leader has reviewed and developed the provision for pupils with SEND. Parents who replied to Ofsted's free-text service say that support for pupils with SEND is improving. Leaders provide training for teachers and ensure that they receive individual plans with guidance on the strategies they should use to support these pupils. The school's own information and scrutiny of pupils' work show that these pupils are making better progress than in the past. However, information about the progress of pupils with SEND is not monitored and evaluated carefully enough to enable them to reach higher standards from their different starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are consistently challenged to enable them to achieve the highest possible outcomes
- they monitor and evaluate the progress of pupils with SEND more closely to enable these pupils to make better progress from their starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, we met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders and teaching and support staff. I met with three members of the governing body, including the chair. I also held a telephone conversation with your external adviser. We carried out observations of teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. We spoke informally with pupils and students during breaktime and lunchtime.

We took account of 43 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 41 free-text responses. We also considered the views of 56 staff and 77 pupils. We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, external reviews and information about pupils' attainment and progress. We also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe, records of training, safeguarding checks, and attendance and behaviour information. I also undertook a review of the school's website.