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Neil Finlay
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Dear Mr Finlay

Short inspection of Walton High School

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 2019 with Natasha Lloyd and Elaine Haskins, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, well supported by senior leaders and governors, provide honest and principled leadership that is valued by pupils, parents, carers and staff. Leaders and governors know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses. Leaders' plans to address weaknesses are clear and well focused on key priorities. However, leaders do not always evaluate the impact that actions are having as well as they could.

The school's stated aims are to ensure that pupils achieve well academically and develop the skills and attitudes to be happy and successful members of society. The school is successful in achieving these aims. The curriculum provides a very wide range of choices for pupils that successfully engages them in their learning. It is supplemented by a vibrant extra-curricular programme that pupils enjoy.

Pastoral care and support are strengths of the school. Staff know pupils well and are quick to provide support when it is needed. Pupils and parents value the school's caring and supportive ethos.

The school was previously inspected in 2012, before it opened as an academy. At that time, inspectors charged leaders with further developing aspects of teaching and improving communication with parents. Both areas have improved since that time.

Teaching is now effective across all subjects. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan engaging lessons with work that is usually well matched to pupils' abilities. They use questions well to check on pupils' knowledge and to deepen their understanding of the work being studied. Teachers usually challenge pupils to think hard. Because pupils like and trust their teachers, they are confident in answering questions and attempting difficult tasks.

Although a small number of parents who responded to Parent View expressed concerns about communication, most said they receive valuable information from the school and that the school responds well to any concerns they have. The great majority of parents said they would recommend the school to another parent. The school is consistently oversubscribed, with more parents wanting their children to attend than the school has places.

Safeguarding is effective.

Strong leadership of safeguarding ensures that all staff understand that keeping pupils safe is their top priority. All safeguarding policies and procedures are clear, fit for purpose and understood well by staff. Because of regular and comprehensive training, staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help. They readily pass on concerns about pupils to leaders, who deal with them appropriately. Leaders work closely with outside agencies to ensure that pupils get the right support.

Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke to inspectors confirmed this to be the case. They said that bullying is rare. Most pupils have had no first-hand experience of bullying in school. Pupils trust the school's staff and have confidence in them to deal with any problems, including bullying, when they arise.

A thorough personal, social, health and economic education programme ensures that pupils understand the risks they face, for example when using the internet or from alcohol and drugs. They also know how to protect themselves from these dangers.

Parents who responded to Parent View were positive about the school's work to support and care for their children. Almost all said that their children are safe in school. All staff who completed Ofsted's inspection questionnaire agreed.

Inspection findings

- The first area that inspectors considered was the school's curriculum and specifically the extent to which it promotes the progress of high-attaining pupils. Published outcomes in 2018 showed high-attaining pupils making weaker progress than other pupils nationally with the same starting points. This was the case in several subjects. Leaders acknowledge that, although most pupils achieved well, too few achieved the top GCSE grades.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of choice for pupils in key stage 4 and

these are successful in engaging pupils in their learning. From September 2018, pupils have started GCSE courses in Year 9 rather than Year 10. Leaders have made this change so that pupils have sufficient time to study four option subjects of their choice, in addition to the core curriculum that all follow. While it is too early to properly judge the success of this change, pupils in Year 9 who spoke with inspectors said they are enjoying their option subjects. Pupils are encouraged to pursue subjects to a greater depth in their own time, achieving the 'Walton Baccalaureate' when they have completed a number of activities in several subjects. However, the number of pupils currently engaging with this programme is low. Leaders have not evaluated whether the programme is succeeding in its aim of encouraging pupils' love of learning.

- Leaders are clear about their intent to provide a challenging academic curriculum for high-attaining pupils from Year 7 to Year 13. They are successful in this. They have put in place several courses specifically aimed at these pupils, including GCSEs in physics, chemistry, biology and further mathematics. In other subjects, effective teaching and well-planned schemes of work ensure that high-attaining pupils are provided with sufficient challenge. Consequently, the progress of high-attaining pupils is improving.
- The inspection's second focus area was on teaching and outcomes in English and mathematics. In 2018, pupils' attainment and progress fell a little in these subjects when compared with the previous year. In response to these outcomes and their own self-evaluation, senior and middle leaders have focused on improving pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. They have revised the curriculum in key stage 3 in both of these subjects to provide pupils with greater challenge. This has proved successful, although more so in mathematics than in English.
- In mathematics, leaders have designed a curriculum that builds well on what pupils have learned during key stage 2. Consequently, pupils are faced with challenging work from the start of Year 7. In English, leaders have not taken into account the key stage 2 primary curriculum when planning what pupils will learn in key stage 3. Consequently, although there is generally an appropriate level of challenge, at times, pupils repeat work they have already mastered. Several pupils in Year 7 told inspectors that English is easier in Year 7 than it was last year when they were in Year 6.
- The next area that inspectors considered was the school's sixth form. The sixth form has many strengths. Teaching is strong and students make good progress in all subjects as a result. Students value the sixth form and the wide range of opportunities it provides for them. Pastoral and academic support are particularly strong. Students told inspectors they are very well cared for and supported by their teachers, leaders and other staff.
- Some aspects of sixth-form provision are weaker. Leaders have not paid sufficient regard to the government's guidance on planning and delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes. Consequently, aspects of students' study programmes are not well planned with an eye on their career aspirations. For example, few sixth-form students undertake work experience that would help them gain the opportunity to develop their career choices, get a first taste of work, and develop

critical employability skills. Similarly, although there are opportunities for students to take part in other activities, such as volunteering, these are not carefully planned to take account of students' needs and career plans.

- The inspection's final focus area was on pupils' attendance and behaviour. Attendance is consistently higher than the average in similar schools nationally. Leaders relentlessly reinforce the importance of good attendance. Pupils enjoy school and almost all attend regularly.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are keen and often enthusiastic, with strong attitudes to learning. At lunchtime, breaktime and between lessons, the school is calm and orderly. Pupils are polite and well-mannered. Because pupils behave well, the school's use of sanctions, including fixed-term exclusion, is lower than the national average and that seen in similar schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programmes are well planned, taking full account of government guidance
- leaders carefully evaluate the impact their actions are having
- the progress of high-attaining pupils continues to improve in all subjects
- the English curriculum in key stage 3 builds well upon what pupils have learned during key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. We visited several classes with senior leaders, during which time we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. We considered the 24 responses from pupils to their online inspection questionnaire. Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and safeguarding and child protection records. Parents' views were considered through the 168 responses to Parent View, including the 99 free-text comments and one letter from a parent. Inspectors also considered the 61 responses from members of

staff to their online inspection questionnaire.