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22 February 2017

Mrs Victoria Michael
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Michael

Short inspection of Carnforth High School

Following my visit to the school on 08 February 2017 with Ofsted Inspector, Phil Hyman, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Appointed since the last inspection, you have made wholesale improvements to the school. Not only have you tackled weaknesses seen at the time of the last inspection, but you have also responded to external factors such as the introduction of new accountability measures, raised expectations of new GCSEs and implementation of the new national curriculum.

Following your appointment, you quickly set about investigating why the proportions of pupils exceeding expected progress from their starting points were not consistently higher than those found nationally, as stated in the previous inspection report. You identified that the courses available for pupils restricted the amount of progress they could make and many pupils were denied the opportunity to follow an academic curriculum. Following your review of the curriculum, you reduced the number of vocational courses on offer and increased the range of GCSE subjects available for pupils, including the opportunity for more pupils to study a modern foreign language. Pupils are now better matched to science courses which are more appropriate for their ability. As a result, more pupils complete Year 11 with qualifications which prepare them well for A level study, college courses, training and university. The proportion of pupils who continue in education, employment or training is now above the national average and the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving this is above that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Having tackled weaknesses in the curriculum, you then set about improving teaching, learning and assessment. You provide support plans for teachers needing to further develop their practice, and rigorously monitor their progress against sharply focused targets. Many teachers respond well to this support and diligently tackle their weaknesses while others choose to leave the school rather than adapt to the new raised expectations. As a result, teaching is improving and pupils are making better progress from their starting points. Teachers plan appropriately challenging work for pupils and, through effective questioning, they encourage pupils to explain their responses and discuss their thinking. Marking consistently follows the school's new assessment policy and teachers willingly share ideas within subject departments and across the school. These changes have, very successfully, tackled all the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

Other lines of enquiry were followed during this inspection. Disadvantaged pupils attend school less often, and make slower progress than their classmates and much slower progress than other pupils nationally, so I wanted to find out what you are doing about this. I also wanted to find out about the developments you have made to the 16 to 19 study programme because this had only very recently been introduced at the time of the last inspection and standards in the sixth form are below the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have successfully created a culture of safeguarding among staff in which all understand their responsibilities to keep children safe. Staff know the signs to look out for that may mean a pupil is at risk of harm, and they know the correct procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil. You take seriously the vetting of visitors to the school, including checking the content of presentations that outside speakers intend to use in assembly. You have introduced rigorous checking procedures for members of the public who use the on-site hair salon to make sure there are no risks if they come into contact with pupils, and signing in and out procedures are always followed. Pupils are safe at this school and they are taught how to keep themselves safe through themes in their 'life course' which effectively links personal, social and health education, and religious education. Pupils know about cyber bullying and keeping safe when using social media and e-safety.

Inspection findings

- You have introduced a new approach to assessment without levels which leaders and teachers use rigorously to identify pupils at risk of underachievement, based on them failing to meet their aspirational targets. You provide tailored interventions and support for pupils to help fill gaps in their learning so that they catch up quickly. Support for literacy development is particularly strong and pupils greatly appreciate the help they receive through one-to-one reading, peer reading to older pupils and a wide range of published resources you have purchased for pupils. Pupils proudly share how many months' progress they have

made over a far shorter time period, representing accelerated progress.

- Your own assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than they have done in the past, especially in the previously weak subjects of English and science. Although some pupils are still at risk of failing to meet their challenging targets, many are 'on track' and some are exceeding their expected progress. Inspectors could see no discernible difference in the work in books for disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.
- Further improvement is needed to the way in which you review assessment information in school, and the way you present this information to governors. You compare the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school with disadvantaged pupils nationally. This suggests a lack of aspiration in wanting to tackle underachievement for this group which governors fail to challenge.
- Poor attendance and frequent absences prevent some disadvantaged pupils from making the progress they should. Overall attendance has fallen since the same point last year, despite the first day of absence texts and telephone calls to parents. 'Waves' of intervention are put into place for pupils, increasing the interventions for those with the lowest attendance. However, these actions are not reducing absence. A review of the school's work to improve attendance is needed to build on the strategies that are working well and change those that are having little impact.
- You have continued to improve the effectiveness of the 16 to 19 study programme as the sixth form has continued to grow. Students have benefited from better teaching and a review of the subjects offered, leading to more appropriate courses for students. As a result, students overall are making better progress than in the past and strengths in vocational learning continue. Some enrichment opportunities are available for students but they do not have enough opportunity to have a wider impact on school life through taking on leadership roles in the school.
- Plans are at an advanced stage to form a multi-academy trust (MAT) with another school judged outstanding in its last inspection. Further improvements are being explored for the sixth form as you gradually move away from the federation of schools working collaboratively to teach sixth form students in the area, and instead deliver post-16 education through the MAT.
- Governance continues to be effective but monitoring of some aspects of the school's work is not sufficiently sharp; for example, in evaluating the impact of the pupil premium grant. A full review of the work of governors is planned as the school forms the new MAT.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further action is taken to tackle the recent decline in overall attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- they monitor, more rigorously, all aspects of the school's work so they are

confident that aspirations are high enough to make sure pupils' achievements continue to improve, including for disadvantaged 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 Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met you and other leaders, a group of governors including the chair of the governing body and spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone. The views of parents were considered through Ofsted's online questionnaire. Other views were considered from Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys. Inspectors also talked with pupils and staff during the day. You joined inspectors in visits to lessons and in checking pupils' progress from their work in books. An inspector listened to pupils read and checked your safeguarding documentation.