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Mr Philip Hyman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hyman

Short inspection of Kirkbie Kendal School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 2018 with Tanya Sheaff, 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 September 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 gathered together a leadership team that has many strengths. You know the strengths of the school but also what areas need to be improved. Since the last inspection you have brought about improvement that has had a positive impact on outcomes for pupils.

An area of improvement from last inspection was to bring about improvements to teaching and learning. You have taken a range of actions to support teachers. Detailed feedback from lesson observation ensures that teachers receive individualised support to improve their teaching. As a result, pupils are now benefiting from strong teaching across a range of subjects. This is helping all pupils to improve, particularly disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils in the school make good progress over a range of subjects. English, mathematics and science are particularly strong, and pupils attain well in these subjects. Consequently, the proportion of pupils that attain a strong pass in English and mathematics is slightly higher than the national average.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They listen carefully during learning and contribute well to class discussions. They remember what they have already learned and talk confidently about how they use this to help them make links to new learning. Pupils are confident and ask the teacher for help when they need it.

Teachers feel that the professional development that you provide encourages and challenges them. As a result, they feel valued and supported. Teachers think that you manage the school well and consider their well-being when making decisions. They are proud to be part of the school.

Pupils' behaviour in social areas around the school is good. They are polite and friendly; they treat each other and staff with respect. Pupils say that they enjoy school. They think that their teachers challenge them but support them when they need help. Pupils also say that they are taught how to keep themselves healthy and that they understand fundamental British values.

Parents and carers are very positive about the school. They are particularly happy with the pastoral care that their children receive. Parents say that you and your staff respond quickly to any concerns that they raise. They say that their children are safe and happy at school. Parents say that their children learn well and make good progress. They believe that you lead the school well, and they would recommend the school to other parents.

The four trustees of the academy sit on the governing body. Governors have a wide range of skills and experience that they bring to the role. They have confidence in you and your leadership team. They know what the school is doing well and where it needs to improve. They take their roles very seriously and hold you to account for school improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding procedures in school are strong. The necessary checks are made so that all staff employed at the school are suitable to work with children. All staff receive safeguarding training regularly and leaders provide frequent updates. Consequently, all staff are vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety.

You and your leaders have forged links with several outside agencies. You can therefore ensure that appropriate support is provided promptly for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils talk confidently about keeping themselves safe online. They told inspectors that bullying was rare and that any that happened was dealt with quickly by staff.

Inspection findings

- I was interested to find out about the improvements you have made to teaching. You and your leaders have provided appropriate individualised support to help teachers to improve their practice. The actions that you have taken ensure that pupils benefit from routinely strong teaching across the school. Pupils' progress has improved in most subjects as a result.

- I was also interested to find out how you had brought about the improvement in pupils' attendance. I wanted to see if attendance had improved for all groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils. You explained that you had appointed an attendance officer, and this had a significant impact on improving the overall attendance figure.
- While the overall attendance figure has improved, attendance for disadvantaged pupils is not as strong as for other pupils in school. There has been significant improvement in attendance for these pupils; however, their attendance remains below the national average for all pupils. Similarly, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school, while improving, remains higher than the national average for all pupils.
- At the time of the last inspection disadvantaged pupils were not making strong progress. You have taken steps to improve disadvantaged pupils' achievement. For example, you have employed extra teachers who work mainly with disadvantaged pupils to give support when needed. Work in pupils' books shows that for many disadvantaged pupils there is little difference in their progress and the progress of other pupils in the school.
- I was interested in finding out how you identified barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. You and your leaders have identified some of the key barriers, for example poor attendance. However, the identification of the precise barriers for individual pupils is not always accurate enough. Consequently, for a small proportion of pupils, the actions that you are taking do not tackle the underlying barriers to success.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they identify precisely the barriers that individual disadvantaged pupils face and provide appropriate support so that these pupils can achieve the standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we examined a range of documents, including: safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' performance and attendance; and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.

We met with you and other members of your leadership team. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair.

We observed learning with school leaders in several subject areas and looked at work in pupils' books. Together with senior leaders, we also examined the work across a range of subjects of a group of current pupils. We spoke formally to groups of pupils from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 and informally to others around the school. We observed pupils' behaviour both in and out of lessons.

We reviewed the 23 responses to the pupil survey and the 123 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the 113 responses that parents submitted to the free-text service and considered the 62 responses to the staff questionnaire.