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Mrs Gillian Middlemas
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Dear Mrs Middlemas

Short inspection of Whitworth Community High School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018 with Timothy Gartside, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has continued to improve since then. This journey of improvement is a result of your relentless drive to embed a culture of high aspirations and expectations throughout the school. Leaders and governors are dedicated to ensuring that pupils have a wide range of choices open to them when they move on to their next steps after Whitworth. You strive, with parents and carers, to develop pupils into responsible young people who can make their community a better place. You do this through providing an environment where pupils learn well, feel listened to and are safe. Your expectation that staff are 'consistent, persistent, insistent' filters down to pupils as you encourage them to focus on what they are learning, instead of what they are doing.

Governors, parents, staff and the local authority speak positively about your strong leadership. Parents state how the school is continuing to 'grow from strength to strength' as a result of your 'forward-thinking, innovative and child-centred' approach. The local authority is a valuable source of support for the school. You work closely with the local authority and other schools to ensure that pupils continue to have a good experience of school. Pupils commented on how behaviour and the reputation of the school have improved under your leadership.

You, senior leaders and governors have effectively addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection. You have improved outcomes in English through developing teaching, creating a committed team of teachers and setting robust targets. As a result, English is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy their

English lessons and make good progress. Attainment has also risen considerably. The school is rightly proud that, in 2017, Whitworth was the most improved school in Lancashire for pupils achieving grades four and above in English and mathematics combined. Seventy-one per cent of pupils achieved success in this measure, while the national average was 63%.

You and leaders have also secured improvements to the quality of teaching and learning across the school. You have developed a teaching-and-learning protocol which sets out clear expectations for staff and pupils. Alongside an individualised programme of training for teachers, you enable staff to reflect on and improve their practice. Robust procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning over time are in place. Staff now confidently use information about pupils' prior learning to plan work which is appropriate for pupils' needs.

Leaders provide additional training sessions for teachers to help them improve their questioning techniques. They encourage teachers to undertake 'tours of strength' where they can see and learn from the good practice in the school. As a result, questioning has improved considerably, but you are aware that this is not yet consistently strong across the school.

You, the leadership team and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved further. During the inspection, we discussed the next steps for the school. First, you identified that you will continue to work to reduce variability in the quality of teaching and learning within departments and across the school. Second, you acknowledged the need to continue to ensure that learning activities consistently stretch and challenge pupils of all abilities, particularly the most able.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leadership of safeguarding is very strong. There is a culture of safeguarding which permeates the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Procedures for recruiting staff are thorough and meet statutory requirements. Staff are well trained on a wide variety of recent, relevant safeguarding issues. They know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils.

Leaders know individual pupils and their families well. As a result, leaders are responsive to meeting pupils' needs and provide good support for all pupils, including those looked after. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies and are proactive in referring any concerns to the appropriate professionals.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, particularly online. They said that they feel safe in the school and that they have a number of ways to raise any concerns they may have. Parents agreed that their children are safe and happy in the school.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of the inspection was to consider the progress of pupils at key stage 4, particularly in mathematics, science and humanities. Leaders and governors acknowledge that achievement in these subjects dipped in 2017. Leaders were

quick to respond and implement a range of strategies to ensure that the progress of current learners is better. They have undertaken reviews of subjects and put extra support in place where it is needed.

- The progress of current pupils across year groups is good. The information provided by the school, considered alongside the quality of teaching over time seen during the inspection and in pupils' books, shows that pupils now make more secure progress in these subject areas. Teachers analyse pupils' understanding and identify gaps in their learning. They then use this information to plan work which meets pupils' needs and extends their learning.
- Leaders set challenging and aspirational targets for pupils. Pupils understand these targets and can explain what grade they are working at and what they need to do to improve.
- The strong subject knowledge of teachers helps them to ensure that they focus appropriately on teaching pupils about examination content and technique. Pupils are clear about common misconceptions and appreciate the help and support they get from teachers in preparation for examinations. Pupils said that one of the best things about the school is 'the teachers and the help they give you'.
- However, the progress of some most-able pupils is variable in some subjects, for example in science. The progress of the most able pupils in some subject areas still lags behind that of others and you are aware that there is still some work to do to diminish these differences further.
- Leaders and staff work hard to improve the attendance of pupils, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders monitor attendance closely; where issues are identified they deal with them quickly and effectively. In addition, you work closely with external agencies so that the appropriate support can be given. As a result, the attendance of pupils is improving towards the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who regularly miss school has fallen considerably this year. Leaders' thorough analysis of trends and close relationships with families have ensured that more pupils now attend school regularly. The work of the attendance officer, a newly created post in the school, is beginning to pay dividends in this area.
- Pupils speak highly of the attendance rewards they receive. They enjoy being in the school and do their best not to have time off. Leaders and governors work continuously with parents so that they realise the importance of their child not missing valuable learning time. As you rightly recognise, when pupils are in school, they are safe and they are learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop the strategy to stretch and challenge all pupils, including the most able, so that they make rapid and sustained progress across a wide range of subjects

- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning to secure consistency, both within and across departments.

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

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other senior leaders, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. We met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons.

You and senior leaders accompanied inspectors on visits to classes where we observed teaching and learning, spoke with pupils and looked at the work in some pupils' books. We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, leadership and management and the school's assessment information related to pupils' progress and attainment. We also considered the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation report.

As part of the inspection, we considered the views expressed by parents in the 27 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via the free-text facility on Parent View. We also took into account the 45 responses to a questionnaire for staff and pupils' responses to surveys conducted by the school.