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Ms Rebekah Phillips
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Dear Ms Phillips

Short inspection of Woodchurch High School

Following my visit to the school on 27 April with Claire Hollister, 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is improving because of the strong leadership you provide and the able support of your senior leadership team. Leaders have clear lines of responsibility and work well together across their specific areas of interest. You have established a culture of high aspirations and accountability, as a result of which pupils' outcomes are improving. The leadership of teaching is good. You have a clear understanding of the quality of learning that takes place across the school and use appropriate strategies to maximise improvements. You and your senior leaders know where expertise lies within the staff and you provide regular training to develop teaching further. Improved teaching throughout the past year has helped to accelerate pupils' progress. As a result, pupils achieve well in a range of subjects, particularly in English, mathematics, geography, history, religious studies, computer science, art and design, and information and communication technology (ICT). Leaders across the school work in collaboration and understand the calibre of their workforce. Your leaders regularly seek external checks and validation and consequently leaders' predictions of pupils' outcomes are accurate. You have selected a skilled leadership team that expresses the school's values and aspires to drive further improvements across the school. Consequently, most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection are being tackled effectively.

As a Church of England academy you have developed a distinctive ethos, rich in Christian values. You actively promote the spiritual development of pupils but also their social, moral and cultural development, so they are able to make a positive contribution to society. This approach and ethos is woven across the curriculum and it shapes the day-to-day lives of all pupils. Staff expect all pupils to work hard, and aim high; they provide a supportive environment where everyone is encouraged to strive and achieve their potential. The school has a unique family feel where everyone is highly valued and strong relationships are formed between staff and pupils. The majority of pupils and learners display pride in their work and have good attitudes to learning. During break and lunchtime, pupils cooperate and clearly enjoy spending time together. Pupils walk calmly around the well-maintained site and display good manners and respect for others around them. Pupils who spoke with inspectors stated that behaviour in lessons is good and that their learning is rarely disrupted.

You have ensured that all staff work hard and you encourage opportunities to celebrate and reward pupils. For example, inspectors observed an assembly in which pupils were celebrated with commendations: Improved Attendance Award, Form Inspection Award, Headteacher Award and the Good Samaritan Award. Staff at the school are clear on your vision to ensure that pupils respect and value each other and make the best of their abilities. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to the school and enjoy the challenge and opportunity to develop their leadership and make a difference for others. Pupils spoke highly of taking part in the 'Archbishop of York Award', which empowers pupils to be active citizens in the local community; making a difference. Pupils also fine tune their leadership skills by taking part in roles such as prefects, Christian values representatives, subject ambassadors and 'Eco' representatives.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership of safeguarding in the school is strong. Safeguarding arrangements and procedures operate properly and promptly. The school's safeguarding policy is clear and informative, reflecting current guidance and requirements. Leaders use the school newsletter to promote safeguarding and alert parents to any issues of local or national concern. You have ensured that all staff have been appropriately trained in child protection and safeguarding issues. Consequently, staff and governors are well versed in their responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of all pupils. You wisely and appropriately use the advice and expertise from a governor who is also a safeguarding officer for the local authority.

Pupils are taught about cultures and lifestyles that are different from their own. For example, the school organised an external company to run a thought-provoking workshop for pupils to reflect and discuss issues relating to the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) community. Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe and leaders have ensured that appropriate information is delivered through the curriculum. Pupils were able to explain to inspectors about a recent assembly on staying safe online. The assembly explored issues relating to child sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attainment is significantly above national averages in English, geography, history and religious education and above the national average in mathematics.
- The percentage of pupils who gained five or more GCSE grade A* to C in English and mathematics was above the national average in 2015. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs grade A* to grade G has consistently been above national averages for three years.
- Pupils' expected progress in English and mathematics was above national averages in 2015. However, leaders have not been swift enough to improve science and modern foreign languages as pupils' achievement in these areas is not as strong as national expectations. While there is some improvement in modern foreign languages, there is still further development needed to improve science teaching. Strong middle leader appointments and appropriate strategies are in place to improve science learning for pupils currently in school.
- Leaders have taken effective action to narrow the gap between the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in the school and nationally. Gaps in English are closing more rapidly than in mathematics.
- A spirit of inclusion pervades the school, characterised by harmony and respect. The school has an inclusion unit for pupils who have a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. Teaching assistants are well deployed to support the needs of pupils. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and anticipate their needs so that barriers to learning are removed. Leaders ensure that pupils who have special educational needs or disability are well supported to access mainstream education. Consequently, pupils make great strides in their learning academically and socially; the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average.
- Improvements to the overall quality of teaching and learning have been at the heart of the school's work since the last inspection. Teachers benefit from regular scheduled professional development opportunities. There are many opportunities to share good practice, including through staff groups established as teaching and learning communities. These groups enable teachers to try new approaches to improve their practice.
- There are a few next steps to improve pupils' learning further. For example, too few pupils experience good-quality discussion and oracy development in their learning. This is a barrier to further achievement and the development of pupils' confidence.
- Leaders ensure that assessments are rigorously and frequently implemented across the curriculum to establish the depth of pupil's understanding. However, guidance provided to pupils as to how to improve their work is not always in line with school policy and sharply focused. Consequently, opportunities for improving pupils' achievement even further are sometimes missed.
- You have developed an effective careers education and guidance programme. This results in a high proportion of pupils successfully continuing in education, training or employment after Year 11. Destinations and next steps are well planned and clearly supported; all pupils receive high-quality advice and guidance. Enterprise and employability skills are taken seriously and the school invests heavily in work experience for all pupils. Events are offered across the year to raise aspirations, particularly for the disadvantaged.

- Leaders remain focused on improving attendance across the school and use a wide variety of strategies to promote the importance of attendance among pupils. Leaders have ensured that this is a focus for all staff. This shared responsibility has raised the profile and expectation of attendance. Consequently pupils' overall attendance is now in line with national averages. However, attendance has not improved quickly enough for those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding.
- Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are good. Teachers consistently uphold the behaviour policy and this promotes an environment where pupils can enjoy learning. Leaders have improved the approaches to managing behaviour and consequently there has been a decline in the number of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion.
- Governors have a strong sense of commitment and are striving to further improve the quality of education available to pupils at the school. Governors are a loyal, cohesive working group who use their plethora of skills to challenge and support the school well. They are very well informed about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and have a first-class understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governing body committees are well organised and attended, and provide an appropriate platform to question impact and hold leaders to account. Governors have ensured that the academy's website meets requirements.
- Most of the parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their child is well looked after. Parents hold teachers and leaders of the school in high regard and recognise the efforts made to ensure that their children thrive and achieve. There were several positive comments on the online questionnaire about pupils' personal development; for example: 'We are very grateful to have such an amazing school for our children. I am also very happy that it is a Church of England Academy and that my children receive a good moral and ethical education.' Comments were also positive about pupils' achievement, stating, for example: 'The staff have always strived to help my child to achieve the best that they possibly can by giving the correct amount of encouragement and direction that enables them to flourish.'
- Staff are very positive about working at the school and understand the culture and ethos. A comment by a member of staff on the online survey conducted by inspectors epitomised the views of many: 'I am fully invested in the vision of this school. We work hard for the justice of the children and to make a real difference to their lives and prospects. The school's Christian values give a strong moral compass and instilling these values in staff and pupils contributes to the ethos.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they pursue further improvements of pupils' achievements in science
- teachers provide even sharper guidance to pupils as to how to improve their work and skills
- pupils have wider opportunities to develop oracy across the curriculum, to further extend pupils' confidence and achievement

- they capitalise on successful attendance strategies to further improve the attendance of 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 the Wirral Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors undertook 'learning walks' and observed teaching and learning in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and humanities. Inspectors scrutinised the work in some pupils' books during visits to classrooms.
- Meetings took place with you, your senior leaders, members of the governing body, a local authority adviser and groups of pupils.
- A telephone call was made to the school improvement adviser with whom the school works in partnership.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils around the school to gather views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the academy's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance and information relating to pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account 215 responses to Parent View, along with 77 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 107 responses to the online pupils' questionnaire.