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Mrs Diane Atkinson
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Dear Mrs Atkinson

Short inspection of Blackburn Central High School

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2017 with Liam Trippier, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. All leaders, governors and staff are highly committed to pupils and their families. You have high expectations of pupils and for pupils, and this is clearly evident in your continued and relentless drive for success for all members of the school. Leaders, staff and pupils work happily together to create a calm, purposeful and harmonious atmosphere. The vast majority of parents feel that the school is very caring and say that teachers and leaders are 'supportive, friendly and approachable'.

There have been considerable changes in staffing since the last inspection. You have increased the number of teaching staff, improved leadership capacity and developed new roles to support pupils. The school is continuing to grow in size and popularity due to the strong links and trust you have developed with the local communities you serve. You have worked tirelessly to create a safe environment for pupils, where they enjoy their learning and are developing into confident young people, well equipped for life in modern Britain.

Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in the school is good, that teachers are supportive and guide them well and that they feel like they 'all get along like one family, with one voice'. Pupils are particularly proud of the charity work they do and display genuine care and compassion to those less fortunate than themselves. Staff are proud to work at Blackburn Central High school, commenting, 'The school feels like a family and the pupils are happy. Leaders are approachable, yet have very high standards for both staff and pupils.'

You, senior leaders and governors have taken effective action to address the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection, for example in raising outcomes for the most able pupils, particularly in English and in modern foreign languages. Leaders have also secured improvements to develop the independence of pupils. Pupils work well in lessons. High levels of engagement were evident across almost all lessons observed by inspectors. Pupils speak highly of the growth mindset training they receive in 'Progress Time' and say that it prepares them well for learning.

In response to improving opportunities for teachers to share what works best in lessons with each other, you create regular opportunities for staff to share good practice through collaboration. Staff work in small groups, trialling new strategies to enable them to fully reflect on and improve their practice. A school improvement coach provides effective and bespoke professional development for staff at different stages in their career. All teaching staff are ambitious to improve and determined to deliver high-quality teaching for the benefit of pupils.

In response to improving numeracy skills, you have appointed a leader of numeracy, created a working party and raised the profile of numeracy across the curriculum. Staff are developing common approaches to the teaching of numerical skills, particularly in the mathematics and science departments. Finally, you have implemented a marking policy which is used consistently by teachers. The vast majority of feedback is effective in moving pupils on in their learning.

You and your governors have a very strong 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 acknowledged that you will continue to improve attendance, especially for disadvantaged and White British pupils. Your focus on reducing persistent absence is having a positive impact, as rates of persistent absence have fallen considerably. We discussed the need to ensure that parents continue to support the school by not removing pupils during term-time for extended holidays. Second, you acknowledged the need to continue to improve the progress of pupils, particularly middle-ability pupils, so that the progress of these pupils is rapid and sustained across the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leadership of safeguarding is very strong. There is a culture of safeguarding which runs throughout the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose; records are detailed and of high quality. Procedures for recruiting staff are robust and meet statutory requirements. Staff have completed all relevant and recent training and they know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils.

Leaders liaise highly effectively with external agencies and are proactive in referring any concerns to the appropriate professionals. Leaders ensure that the school is responsive to meeting pupils' needs and provide good support for all pupils, including those who are looked after. Leaders are proactive in ensuring that pupils are safe from all forms of extremism and radicalisation and monitor pupils closely to ensure that they stay safe from harm.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, particularly online, as they have been well taught. Parents have also received support and training from the school on how to keep their children safe online. Pupils spoken to during the inspection say that they feel safe in school and that there are a number of ways to raise any concerns they may have. This includes talking to teachers. Pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the support and guidance they receive from staff. Parents and staff agree that pupils are safe and happy in school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is significantly below the national average. From their starting points, pupils make progress across the curriculum which is in line with national averages.
- Disadvantaged pupils and White British pupils made slower progress across the curriculum in 2016. Leaders are aware of this and track the progress of these groups of pupils closely to ensure that effective interventions are swiftly put into place.
- Scrutiny of the work of current pupils, coupled with evidence seen in lessons, shows that the focus on groups of pupils is making a positive difference in improving their progress and attainment across the curriculum.
- The careful use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities means that current learners are making progress more in line with their peers from similar starting points.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. The curriculum pathways offered to pupils at key stage 4 are wide and varied. Pupils receive clear, individualised guidance from leaders and are supported in choosing courses at the appropriate level to maximise their opportunities for academic success.
- The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all pupils and offers challenge to the most able pupils through triple science and the opportunity to study multiple languages to a good choice of level 1 courses. This helps pupils to achieve success.
- The attendance rate of all pupils is in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving.
- Leaders respond swiftly to a pupil's absence and appropriate interventions are rapidly put in place. As a result of this, the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school has fallen significantly, particularly for the most vulnerable students.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils, staff and parents all support this view. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and this is evident in the depth, breadth and completion of work seen in pupils' books. Pupils present their work well and are proud of their achievements.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at Blackburn Central High school is particularly strong. Leaders work tirelessly to ensure that the many international in-year admissions are welcomed into the school and

supported effectively to develop their English skills and integrate with pupils as quickly as possible. Pupils are tolerant and have respect for each other, regardless of background, nationality, race or religion. The community and family ethos of the pupils and staff at the school is tangible.

- Governors are knowledgeable, strong professionals who actively support the ethos of the school and leaders while holding leaders rigorously to account. They are ambitious for all pupils and work closely with leaders to strive for continued improvements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- build on recent improvements in pupils' attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and White British pupils
- continue to maximise the challenge and high-quality provision for middle-achieving pupils so that outcomes at key stage 4 are improved for this group of 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 Blackburn with Darwen. 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, inspectors met with you and your senior leaders and spoke to the chair of governors. 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 your 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 also observed 'progress time' and an assembly. Inspectors also heard pupils read and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work.

We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance and the school's assessment data of pupils' progress and attainment. We also scrutinised a range of policies, minutes of governing body meetings, the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation report.

A review of the school's website which complies with government regulations was undertaken. As part of the inspection, we considered 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, three responses to the pupil questionnaire, 31 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, as well as comments received via the free-text facility.