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Mr Tim Paling
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Dear Mr Paling

Short inspection of Quarrydale Academy

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 2017 with Dorothy Martin, 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 June 2013.

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 set very high expectations for all who work and learn at the school. In the short time since you became headteacher in September 2016, you have acted quickly to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. You found that the progress of the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils was not as good as it should be and took immediate action to tackle this. Your actions are already having an impact, though you know that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils at the school achieve their potential.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the school's many strengths, including pupils' behaviour and safety and the work of the governing body. Leaders and governors have maintained and developed these strengths. You and your staff have created an environment where only the best behaviour is acceptable. Pupils' conduct during the inspection was commendable. Pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and when they moved around the school was sensible and considerate. During lessons, pupils followed teachers' instructions and stayed focused on their learning most of the time. Parents and staff said that behaviour at the school is good and improving. As a result of this good behaviour, teachers can get on with their job and support pupils' learning.

You have high expectations of pupils and staff. School governors share your high expectations and set challenging targets for you to achieve. Governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weakness, and a shared

understanding with senior leaders of what the school needs to do to improve. Governors and senior leaders have a strong sense of moral purpose; they are determined that pupils at the school will achieve their potential.

After the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to improve the impact that subject leaders had on teaching and on pupils' achievements. You have taken decisive action to improve the impact of your leaders on pupils' progress and to help them eradicate weaker teaching. However, some of your middle leaders' work in these areas is very recent and the full effect is not yet evident.

You make your expectations clear to subject leaders and ensure that any improvements needed happen quickly. Leaders respond well to this challenge. You have made it a priority to develop the potential of new and existing leaders at the school. You manage middle leaders directly to ensure that they focus relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching. Your aim is that all pupils will receive consistently good teaching.

Leaders have strengthened the checks they make on the quality of teaching, so that their understanding more accurately reflects pupils' daily classroom experience. These checks are helping leaders and teachers to understand their strengths and plan for improvements. As a result, you have identified strong classroom practitioners who could help other teachers provide greater challenge for the most able pupils. School staff told me that the training they receive is now more relevant to their individual needs. School records make it clear that this more accurate understanding of the quality of teaching is already having a positive impact on pupils' achievements.

Safeguarding is effective

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to help support pupils who are at risk of harm. School leaders prioritise pupils' mental health and employ a counsellor, who supports pupils at times of difficulty. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the way the leaders ensure pupils' safety.

Pupils told inspectors that the school's staff give helpful advice on how to stay safe online. Pupils feel safe at school and told us that bullying is rare. Staff encourage pupils to accept some responsibility for their own safety. For example, pupils are now developing an area on the school's website to help protect young people.

Inspection findings

- The school's records and pupils' work show that leaders' work to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is having an impact. School leaders have carefully identified the reasons why disadvantaged pupils were making less progress than they should. Leaders are now using pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils successfully. School information shows that most disadvantaged pupils are now learning and achieving well. However, these

improvements are recent, and it is important that the school embeds the strategies that appear to be working so that this progress continues.

- Pupils' attendance is around the national average. However, your analysis of last year's examination results showed that the achievement of pupils who did not come to school regularly was too low. Disadvantaged pupils made up most of this group. This year, school staff have taken effective action to reduce pupils' absence in Year 11. Your absence records now show that most of the Year 11 pupils whose absence concerned you have improved their attendance.
- School leaders recognised that too few disadvantaged pupils went on to suitable placements at 16. For you, tackling this weakness was a core professional duty. Leaders made a commitment to improve the support pupils received as they planned their next steps in education or employment. Leaders developed a post with responsibility for improving careers advice and guidance, helping pupils with their options at the age of 16. As a result, all the pupils who left school in 2016 went on to suitable placements and almost all of them have stayed in these placements.
- Middle leadership at the school is improving rapidly. You directly manage all heads of department to ensure a consistent approach. These leaders have responsibility for making sure that teachers follow the school's 'quality standards', designed to improve teaching and ensure that pupils achieve well. You set middle leaders clear, challenging targets for pupils' achievements and hold them to account using these targets. In turn, middle leaders are holding teachers to account and strive for consistently high standards in teaching. School records show that, across different subjects and year groups, most pupils are now making better progress than previously. However, we agreed that some inconsistencies remain; these include the setting of homework and the use of rewards and sanctions.
- Through targeted careers work and assemblies, the school has been successful in raising the aspirations of the most able pupils. Some of the most able pupils I spoke to intend to pursue highly competitive careers, in areas such as medicine and scientific research. School records show that the most able pupils in the school are on course to achieve higher grades in examinations this year than in previous years.
- Leaders have reviewed their approach to teaching the most able pupils. In the past, the school focused on challenging the most able through extra classroom activities. However, through monitoring, you established that this approach was not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils. School leaders now place a much greater emphasis on deeper learning and solving problems, which your records, and some pupils' work, show is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. The school has some teachers who are very skilled at stretching the most able. We saw some very good examples of teachers challenging pupils in lessons. However, we agreed that the most able pupils are not learning consistently well across the school.
- From your records and pupils' work, most pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics than they have in recent years. In English lessons, teachers use high-level vocabulary and expect pupils to use complex language

routinely. English teachers know how to prepare pupils for examinations. Teachers are expertly developing pupils' skills, so that they can tackle the new, more difficult, GCSE examinations confidently. Similarly, pupils are learning well in many mathematics lessons. Mathematics teachers have strong subject knowledge and often plan learning with the needs of pupils firmly in mind. However, inspection activities confirmed that, on occasion, teaching does not cater well enough for pupils' needs or hold their interest.

- Teaching assistants contribute well to the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in some, but not all, lessons. Leaders recognise that they need to consider how they use teaching assistants in classrooms to support learning.
- The school has made the development of reading skills a priority. The most and least able readers read with a level of fluency and understanding that is appropriate for their ability. Pupils enjoy reading and make regular use of the school's library.
- Inspectors saw some well-thought-out examples of the school's work to promote British values. In one lesson, the teacher asked Year 7 pupils to compare modern democratic British values with the values of feudal England. This was very challenging. Pupils were able to consider the advantages and disadvantages of democratic government. It was clear that the pupils value the rights they have in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategies that they have developed are embedded to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
- pupils' progress, including that of the most able, is accelerated further by making greater use of the school's best practitioners to demonstrate teaching which consistently challenges pupils, and making the best use of additional adults to maximise learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Ellenor Beighton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other members of your leadership team to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with middle leaders, who have responsibility for English, mathematics and science, to discuss pupils' progress and the impact of their work to improve the quality of teaching. I met with the chair of governors, who is also the governor with responsibility for safeguarding, to discuss arrangements for pupils' safety and the governors' priorities for improving the school. My colleague spoke to a group of key stage 3 pupils about safety and what it is like to be a pupil at this school. We scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures; the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children; and the school's own assessment of the progress it is making. We undertook observations of learning across the school, including observations with the headteacher and another school leader. We viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I analysed 39 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, 34 free text responses from parents and 49 staff questionnaires.