

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 June 2017

Mrs Nicola Hall
Headteacher
Central Lancaster High School
Crag Road
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA1 3LS

Dear Mrs Hall

Short inspection of Central Lancaster High School

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 2017 with Tanya Sheaff OI, 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. When you became headteacher in September 2016 you quickly made very important strategic and structural changes which have resulted in substantial improvement. Pupils, staff, parents and governors speak very highly of the impact you have had on the school in such a short time. One comment from a pupil typifies views: 'The headteacher already knows the school really well and has taken us out of our comfort zone.'

You have sought a wide range of external expertise to enable your leadership team and staff to come quickly to an accurate evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of your school. This external support has not created a culture of dependence but has strengthened the capacity of leaders. It has given your middle and senior leaders confidence in their own judgement. You have valued the knowledge and skills of long-standing teachers and leaders while ensuring that your school benefits from the appointment of new teachers and leaders recruited from outstanding and good schools.

You immediately recognised that the curriculum provided did not give pupils the opportunity to make the progress of which they are capable. Too many pupils studied only one science and too many took low-level qualifications which are no longer eligible towards overall progress scores. You immediately put in place a curriculum which offers more challenge and opportunity. While it was not possible for leaders to change subject options completely for the current Year 11, they have

done all that is possible to offer these pupils better opportunities to achieve well overall. You have planned further improvements to the curriculum from next academic year, including ensuring that all pupils receive their entitlement to study design and technology.

Previously, there was too much unstructured time during the school day and too little time dedicated to lessons. As a result, in some subjects, particularly the humanities, teachers had too little time to cover the requirements of GCSE examinations. You quickly put in place interim arrangements to maximise the time available for lessons. This year no subjects lack adequate time allocation. An area for improvement in the school's last inspection report was related to pupils not having opportunities to find things out for themselves. The allocation of more lesson time per week has enabled teachers to provide pupils with these opportunities. For next academic year you and your leadership team have devised a radical restructuring of the school day which better suits current curriculum requirements.

Previously the school's predictions of examination performance did not match actual results. Since your arrival you have acted to ensure that the assessment of pupils' progress and attainment is now moderated with external support and is accurate. At the last inspection, an area for improvement was to ensure that activities matched the needs of all pupils. Good-quality tracking systems enable subject and progress leaders to gather a wealth of information on pupils' performance with confidence. They use this information to support the planning of teaching and to arrange effective intervention for those who are falling behind. However, some teaching still does not provide enough challenge for pupils of middle and higher ability.

You and your staff have appropriately prioritised improving pupils' literacy. The way staff have used a structured reading scheme has been very effective. The improvement in reading scores of pupils in Years 7 and 8 has been dramatic and those who needed to catch up with their peers have done so very quickly. Pupils of all abilities clearly enjoy reading and read with confidence.

This year leaders and teachers have been much more tenacious in following up lateness to school and lessons. Consequently, there has been a dramatic improvement in punctuality so that pupils no longer miss valuable learning time.

Expectations of behaviour continue to be high. Your staff generate very positive relationships with pupils and as a result pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school. The school is a very orderly and pleasant learning environment.

Governors bring a wide range of academic, educational and financial expertise. They realise that in the past they were too ready to accept information provided by school leaders without question. They have now undertaken training from the local authority and receive much more detailed information about all aspects of the school. Minutes of meetings show that they now require clear explanations and swift action.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your school is a very vigilant community. All staff have undertaken relevant training and understand that safeguarding pupils is the responsibility of all. Parents and pupils have confidence in the systems and policies that you have put in place to keep pupils safe from physical and emotional harm. Staff have carried out all the checks necessary to ensure that adults in school are suitable to work with children and young people.

Vulnerable pupils feel happy and safe in school because of strong pastoral care and nurturing provision. In assemblies, form time, themed days and information and communication technology lessons, teachers and visitors teach pupils how to keep themselves safe from the dangers presented by the internet and social media.

Inspection findings

- The school's information indicates that pupils in all year groups are making better progress. Mock examination results from November and March show that Year 11 pupils have made rapid progress since November and work in books indicates that this progress has continued this term.
- The quality of teaching continues to be good. A very rigorous monitoring system identifies whether teachers need to improve. Joint learning walks with senior leaders and scrutiny of pupils' work showed inspectors clearly that individual teachers have improved considerably as a result of well-devised support plans.
- The majority of teaching matches work well to pupils' capabilities and prior attainment. However, there is some lack of challenge for pupils of higher and middle ability, particularly in maths and science.
- Leaders' review of the spending of the pupil premium funding is very thorough. In devising this year's plan, leaders have taken into account lessons learned from last year's strategy. The detailed identification of barriers to learning is closely linked to actions, and criteria by which leaders and governors will measure success are precise and measurable. Differences between the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally have diminished more rapidly this year than previously. However, disadvantaged pupils still attend less regularly and make less progress than their peers.
- Although most pupils attend school regularly, overall attendance figures are below national averages. This is because, following the closure of a local school, a significant number of pupils with a history of very poor attendance were admitted to your school. Although the attendance of these pupils has now improved, their overall attendance has a negative impact on school figures. Detailed school information shows that the attendance of all groups has improved this year.
- New leadership of the sixth form has resulted in much better attendance and progress for the students in current Years 12 and 13. There are now stricter entry requirements and better careers education, information, advice and guidance so that students follow more suitable courses. The percentage of students in the current Year 13 who have already applied for or secured a

sustained education or employment/training destination is already much higher than in previous years.

- Governors' plans to close the sixth form with no new intake from September 2017 are based on sincerely held convictions about what is best for the students at this school. They recognise that there are local 16 to 19 institutions with greater financial and staffing resources to provide a much wider sixth-form curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and of those who were admitted to the school after the start of Year 7 improves to at least the level of their peers
- the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve so that it at least matches that of other pupils nationally
- the teaching of pupils of higher- and middle-ability presents enough challenge.

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

Liz Kelly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors had discussions with you and your senior and middle leaders. Jointly with you and members of your senior leadership team we observed teaching. We spoke to a range of pupils in lessons, in discussion groups and at social times. We listened to pupils read and scrutinised reading records. With you and your senior and middle leaders we looked at a wide range of pupils' work. We analysed the website and a range of documents, including the single central record, records of child protection and staff training, school self-evaluation and improvement planning and minutes of governors' meetings. We also scrutinised anonymised case studies of pupils currently in the school. We discussed with senior leaders aspects of safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, the sixth form and the use of funding. We considered 38 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free-text comments made by parents. We also considered 23 responses to Ofsted's online pupils' questionnaire and 46 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.