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Dear Mr Williams

Short inspection of Lymm High School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with Deborah Bailey and David Roberts, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils are extremely proud to attend Lymm High School. They wear their uniform with pride because, for them, it represents the high regard that they place in their school. Pupils feel safe and secure in a school that is characterised by harmonious relationships. There are strong relationships between adults and pupils alike. Teachers have high hopes for pupils and expect the very best from them. This is a school where everyone is accepted for their individuality and uniqueness. It is a school that aims to ensure that inclusivity and scholastic ambition intertwine seamlessly.

Pupils are extremely positive about their learning experiences. They benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge, which inspires them to learn. Pupils also benefit from an extensive extra-curricular programme and strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils recognise that their teachers and other adults go 'the extra mile' for each of them. They are extremely proud, in a very large school, that you know practically everyone by name. For these reasons, pupils reciprocate the care, guidance and support that they receive with extremely high standards of behaviour. They are an absolute credit to the school.

You, your leadership team and governors have an accurate understanding of the quality of education that the school provides. Since your appointment in 2015, you have wasted no time in identifying just what you need to do to improve the school further. Without doubt, you have created a culture of thorough monitoring and

evaluation that is underpinned by honesty and integrity. Your action plans are sharp, precise and contain quantifiable measures of impact on which you can base the progress made towards achieving key priorities. Through your incisive self-evaluation, you recognise that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities still need to make better progress in a small number of subjects. You also acknowledge that students in the sixth form, while making excellent progress on A-level courses, do not make the same strong progress on vocational courses.

Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement. For example, you have continued to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You provide staff with a wide range of ongoing training and middle leaders fulfil their roles effectively. You have also introduced the 'take it further' initiative to challenge pupils to achieve more. Teachers' questioning is secure and this deepens pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Because of your actions to improve teaching, pupils make consistently good progress almost everywhere in the school. That said, some teachers still do not routinely plan activities that precisely meet the needs of pupils to enable them to make more rapid progress. Added to this, although you have diminished the differences in progress between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, there is still some work to do in a minority of subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have created a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders undertake all the necessary checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. They also provide staff with frequent, high-quality training. Leaders commission external audits of safeguarding to ensure that all policies, procedures and practices remain effective. They are proactive in supporting vulnerable pupils with a range of issues; for example, they have a designated mental health lead on the staff. A number of pupils have been trained as youth health champions. They work to raise the profile of mental health issues and remove barriers so that pupils can talk openly about any concerns that they have. Leaders also secure strong links with a wide range of agencies and work effectively with parents and carers. The student support centre is valued by pupils and provides a wide range of support. Effective collaboration with key stakeholders is at the heart of the school's work. Parents overwhelmingly feel that their children are safe in the school. Pupils say that the support that they receive from staff is 'second to none'.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of this inspection, we agreed on several key areas to investigate. The first concerned the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The inspection findings confirm that leaders have a sharp focus on continually improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have commissioned external reviews of provision and acted on the findings. It is clear that leaders routinely

monitor these pupils and provide effective support, advice and guidance as required.

- Pupil premium spending plans are also impressive and effective. The leadership of SEN and/or disabilities is also strong. Leaders were able to provide secure evidence that differences in progress and attainment for these groups are diminishing further this year. Indeed, leaders have robust evidence to show that disadvantaged pupils' progress in GCSE subjects will continue to be strong. Teachers and leaders at all levels effectively track, monitor and evaluate the impact of teaching and learning strategies on vulnerable pupils' progress. That said, leaders accept that there is more to do to ensure that the differences in progress diminish further.
- As part of this inspection, we examined leaders' actions to improve the rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. We also evaluated leaders' work to reduce the proportion of these pupils who are temporarily excluded from school. Inspection evidence confirms that attendance for these groups has improved considerably year on year. The proportion of vulnerable pupils who are regularly absent from school has also declined. In 2017, pupils' overall attendance was above average and the gap between disadvantaged pupils, those who have SEN and/or disabilities and all pupils diminished considerably. Exclusion figures have also halved. Most impressively, every disadvantaged pupil now progresses to employment, education or training.
- The second key line of enquiry concerned the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the progress of pupils in science and English to match the excellent progress that pupils make in subjects such as mathematics, humanities, physical education and modern foreign languages. Leaders have taken effective action to secure further improvement in outcomes in English. From very high starting points, in 2017 pupils made progress that was broadly average in English. While this represents good progress, it does not match the exceedingly strong progress that pupils make in mathematics. In response leaders have made significant changes to teaching and learning in English. Leaders have introduced masterclasses, 'step up' classes, and have reviewed what is taught at key stage 3. The evidence is compelling that pupils are now on track to make even more secure progress in this subject.
- Similarly, in science a new subject leader has taken up post and staffing has stabilised. While pupils make very strong progress in separate sciences, the progress made by some pupils in dual science was not as strong. Leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done. They have implemented effective action plans and developed middle leadership. The subject leader for science has made changes to the key stage 3 curriculum and leaders have reviewed when examinations are taken at key stage 4. Without doubt, substantial improvements have been made in science and leaders are monitoring the progress and attainment of pupils on the dual science route carefully. Leaders' own evidence, coupled with inspectors' evidence, show that current pupils are on track to achieve well.
- The third area of focus for this inspection was around leaders' actions to improve students' progress on non-academic courses in the sixth form to match the

excellent progress that students make on A-level courses. This is because in 2017, students' progress on vocational courses was weak in relation to their high prior attainment. On A-level courses, students made some of the strongest rates of progress seen across the whole country.

- Since your appointment, leaders have robustly monitored and evaluated vocational provision. This is to ensure that study programmes are planned rigorously to meet the needs of students and to prepare them for the next stages in learning. Students are now fully accountable for their own work and there are extremely high expectations on teachers to plan high-quality learning experiences. The sixth-form leaders have reviewed the targets that they set students on vocational courses, introduced highly effective tracking systems, and have ensured that teachers are held to account for students' outcomes. There is now a clear vision for improvement, underpinned by good-quality leadership and tight systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities make consistently good progress from their different starting points
- teachers precisely match learning activities to pupils' needs
- students on vocational courses in the sixth form make equally strong progress as those on A-level courses.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with a range of leaders from across the school, including you, senior leaders, sixth-form leaders and other middle leaders. I held a telephone call with a school improvement partner. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. We also spoke formally with groups of pupils and informally with others around the school and in lessons. Furthermore, we observed teaching and learning in key stages 3, 4 and 5 and undertook a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work. We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance information, pupils' assessment information, a range of policies, your

evaluation of how well the school is performing and your school improvement plan. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, we considered 384 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and free-text service. There were 103 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupils' questionnaire.