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Mrs Anita Rattan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Rattan

Short inspection of Hednesford Valley High School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2019 with Chris Pollitt, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership team have a long-term vision and a clear strategy for improvement that accurately identifies the key priorities for the school.

Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll and the complexity of their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has increased and you have a new senior leadership team. Despite these changes, you and your team have made strong progress towards successfully addressing the areas for improvement identified at your last inspection.

Leaders have secured a precise evaluation of the learning that takes place in the classrooms, and clear processes are in place to gain accurate baselines and set targets for pupils and to monitor their progress. There are many strengths in the systems that you use to monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Inspectors and leaders agreed that pupils are not making as much progress as they could in some subjects and year groups, particularly mathematics at key stage 4. However, pupils who are not achieving their targets are quickly identified and interventions are put in place to support them. This approach is particularly successful at key stage 3.

Pupils are well prepared for the next steps of their education, with detailed and successful transitions into the school, through different key stages and into college. The wide range of experiences during breaks and lunchtimes, including trim trails,

basketball, football and indoor activities, are led by skilled staff who interact well with pupils. As a result, pupils further develop their social and communication skills.

The values of being a good citizen are embedded into the curriculum and the ethos of the school. The school's emotional support unit works successfully with pupils who find engaging in learning challenging. This helps them to develop the skills set and emotional resilience to access their learning and make progress.

Leaders identify staff's potential and develop staff through a strong programme of professional development. The vast majority of staff and pupils are proud to be part of the school. This is evident in the consistently positive relationships between staff and pupils, clear routines and vibrant displays that create a calm learning environment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are trained to an appropriate level for their role and are confident in using the school's systems and procedures to report concerns. They receive feedback on any concerns they raise and know how to escalate concerns, if necessary. All incidents are recorded carefully and followed up with the appropriate agencies, if required.

The school's arrangements to safeguard and promote the well-being of pupils are clear and highly effective. Pupils know how to get help, and the curriculum provides them with the skills they need to keep themselves safe. The designated safeguarding leader demonstrates a detailed knowledge of pupils' welfare needs and fully understands their role and the responsibilities of all staff. It is evident from records and discussions that staff have the necessary knowledge and expertise to keep children safe. Child protection records are of a good quality and are securely stored.

Governors have received appropriate safeguarding training and have a good knowledge of their responsibilities. They are actively involved in recruitment and regularly meet with the designated safeguarding lead to quality assure safeguarding procedures.

Inspection findings

- You have worked closely with governors, the local authority, external agencies, parents and carers to improve attendance. When school strategies have not been effective, you take legal action when appropriate. Your focus on celebrating good attendance has resulted in an increase in pupils achieving 100% attendance.
- The new role of attendance officer has enabled you to gather a detailed knowledge of every pupil with lower than expected attendance. Targets for improvements have been set and appropriate interventions have been put in place. As a result of this highly focused work, attendance is beginning to improve and there is no significant difference in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils. Due to the support pupils looked after receive, their attendance is excellent. Current analysis is at an individual level and does not yet

focus on absence trends for the different groups of pupils or clearly measure the impact of actions taken.

- Inspectors observed that learning is most effective when teachers use a variety of different questioning techniques, match the work precisely to the pupils' needs, and mark in line with the school's policy so that pupils know their targets and what to do to improve their work. When these aspects of teaching were strong, pupils made good progress, were challenged and clearly showed their enjoyment of learning.
- In the majority of cases, work was well matched to the pupils' needs. Inspectors' and leaders' direct observations of learning and scrutiny of work agreed that when there was strong evidence of a good match of work, pupils made good progress over time. However, sometimes this was not the case, particularly in mathematics at key stage 4, where a significant number of pupils were making less than expected progress. Leaders are aware of this and have already put in place measures to address this.
- Independence is often encouraged in lessons, for example pupils plan their own lessons when following the sports leadership course in physical education. This is facilitated by skilful questioning by the teacher and targeted support to enable the pupils to evaluate and reflect on their own performance. The school has good systems in place to promote independent travel through effective training. As a result, the majority of pupils now make their own way to school.
- Inspectors observed some examples of skilled teaching assistants using strong questioning, leading learning and intervening early to provide additional academic and emotional support to pupils. This provided pupils with opportunities to consolidate their knowledge and make good progress because they engaged in learning for longer. Occasionally pupils are overdependent on adults when they are learning. Sometimes the support from teaching assistants is not effective because they provide answers too readily and are not using effective questioning to draw out and embed understanding.
- Leaders have continued to develop the sixth-form curriculum, and students spoke very positively with inspectors about the opportunities available to them. The curriculum is reviewed annually, taking into account the aspirations and achievements of each new cohort of students. By creating a student-centred curriculum, an above-average number of students continue into the sixth form.
- Your sixth form is now well established and growing at Cannock Chase High School, where students are supported by your staff in a base that enables them to further develop their independence. This move has not been welcomed by all parents; however, leaders have planned the students' transition well and ensured that all students are safe and supported by school staff. Students who are currently studying at the new base are very positive about their experiences.
- Some parents have expressed concerns over the intention to base all sixth-form activities at the Cannock Chase High School site. However, the relocated sixth-form base provides opportunities for students to access a broader range of courses, for example health and social care. It also provides students with an experience of being based within a larger educational setting, which helps them

to become accustomed to a larger setting in readiness for their transition to college.

- Sixth-form students access a wide range of work-related learning opportunities through a range of carefully selected accredited courses and work experience. For example, students are able to sell goods they have made on the school's market stall in Cannock. This enables them to use the skills learned in the classroom in a real-world context and as a result better prepares them for work. However, there are sometimes insufficient real-world examples being incorporated into lessons that would further reinforce students' understanding of the world around them.
- The curriculum for key stage 4 pupils has been designed to provide a broad curriculum experience with a combination of vocational and academic subjects which effectively prepare pupils for their next steps in education. This continues into the sixth form, where the curriculum is centred around work experience, work-based activities and careers advice. As a result, pupils continue successfully in education post-16 and post-19.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' learning is improved further, particularly in mathematics at key stage 4, by:
 - ensuring that all staff consistently adhere to the school's assessment and marking policy
 - being more consistent in accurately matching the work set to the pupils' needs
 - ensuring that pupils are not overdependent on adults to provide them with the answers too readily when they are learning
- they continue to drive improvements in attendance by:
 - using attendance data more effectively to investigate absence patterns for the different groups of pupils and to measure the impact of attendance strategies
 - continuing to develop a positive ethos for attendance that celebrates good attendance and educates pupils and parents on the benefits of good attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Field
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair. We visited lessons across the school with you and your senior team and scrutinised a number of pupils' books across a range of subjects. An inspector visited your off-site sixth-form provision at Cannock Chase High School.

We considered the 51 responses to the school's survey of parents. There were only five responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We also considered the three written responses to Parent View.

Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and formally about their learning, how the school supports them and the breadth of their school experiences.

We met with staff to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection and considered the views of staff from the 18 responses to the inspection questionnaire.

Inspectors scrutinised a number of school documents, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation document. Safeguarding records, policies and procedures, including the checks on staff's suitability to work with children, were considered. Information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance were evaluated.