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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Paula Dixon
Headteacher
Upton-by-Chester High School
St James Avenue
Upton-by-Chester
Chester
Cheshire
CH2 1NN

Dear Mrs Dixon

Short inspection of Upton-by-Chester High School

Following my visit to the school on 17 April 2019 with Nel Banfield 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 May 2015.

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 other leaders, including governors, have a clear vision for the school. You are determined that all pupils should benefit from a curriculum that meets their interests and needs, so they are aspirational and prepared for successful lives once they leave. You and other leaders recognise the school's current strengths and clearly prioritise the right aspects for further development. Your key focus is extending the trend of improved progress and attendance for disadvantaged pupils, whose performance has not previously met the higher standard reached by other pupils.

You have largely addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. As a result, the curriculum which pupils, including the most able pupils, follow in mathematics and science at key stage 3 is effective. Pupils present their work with care and precision across subjects and key stages, including in the sixth form. The systems which you have introduced to better monitor and support pupils' good behaviour are effective. Inspectors were impressed by the opportunities introduced across the curriculum from Year 7 through to Year 13 to enhance pupils' literacy. These improvements have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Pupils are taught well in key stage 3 and key stage 4. The actions which you and

other leaders take to strengthen any pockets of weaker teaching are effective. Most pupils and parents agree that teaching is good across the school. As a result, most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make good progress across a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. There is a rising trend in pupils' examination results. In 2018, they were slightly above the national average overall, when compared with other pupils with similar starting points. Almost every pupil moves on to suitable education, employment or training after Year 11. Usually at least half of these pupils join the school's sixth form.

The sixth form provides a wide range of academic A-level courses for students. Overall, these students make progress broadly in line with others with similar starting points nationally. They are prepared well for their next steps in education or training. Most students move on to university courses, including at Russell Group universities, such as Cambridge and Oxford. Students move on to courses which meet their aspirations and interests, including law, medicine and veterinary science.

The school is popular and well regarded in the community. Most of the 167 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were positive about the school, as were the pupils with whom we spoke. Year 7 pupils said that their transition to secondary school has been managed well. They like their new school.

We were impressed by pupils' courtesy and confidence. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with one another and adults. They care about themselves and others. Pupils say that despite the large number of pupils at the school, staff take the time to get to know them well. As a result, they feel that they are valued and cared for by staff. They confirmed that this is a school where equality and inclusion are important and embedded.

Pupils' attendance is well managed and is in line with national averages. However, despite considerable improvement, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils does not match that of others nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Safeguarding records, including checks on employees' suitability to work with children, are complete. Inspectors checked safeguarding referrals. These are followed up and recorded effectively. Staff are routinely updated about safeguarding issues, including how to spot signs of radicalisation and child sexual exploitation, as well as the safety of students in the sixth form.

Pupils feel safe at the school. They say that bullying is rare, that they always report bullying and that they know how to do so. Pupils say that any cases of bullying that they report are dealt with effectively. Staff teach, and remind, pupils how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet.

Inspectors found that systems to support the safety and well-being of pupils who

are absent from school are effective. Leaders manage effectively the safety of the pupils who attend alternative provision.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered was whether school leaders deploy the pupil premium funding effectively. In previous years disadvantaged pupils have been more likely than others to miss lessons due to absence and to be persistently absent. This, alongside other factors, had a negative impact on their progress. In 2018 the examination results of disadvantaged pupils significantly improved on those of the previous year, by a quarter of a grade overall. However, their progress remained below that of others with similar starting points nationally.
- You commissioned an independent review of the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding. This confirmed leaders' view that raising the aspirations and weak attendance of some disadvantaged pupils was pivotal to improving their engagement and learning at school. The actions which you and other leaders have taken this year to secure better attendance and progress for these pupils have had a stark and positive impact. Overall, disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved markedly this year and their persistent absence has reduced dramatically. However, it does not match the attendance of other pupils, which is your desired outcome.
- You and other senior leaders, including governors, have made the progress of disadvantaged pupils a key priority for all staff. You say that these pupils should match the good and improving progress of others. This message is in teachers' constant and sharp focus, which has supported the positive impact of your actions to date. Leaders and governors routinely monitor and evaluate the progress which these pupils make, including in the sixth form. Leaders take swift action when any of these pupils does not progress well.
- The training programme which you have provided for teachers, alongside the increased awareness of their responsibility to make sure that disadvantaged pupils' progress consistently matches that of others, has led to stronger learning for these pupils across all subjects. However, despite this considerable improvement, there is still some work to do to ensure that disadvantaged pupils match the progress made by other pupils nationally.
- Our second focus area was to establish whether leaders have embedded the strong progress of the most-able pupils in mathematics and science in key stage 3 since the last inspection. We found that, overall, these pupils make effective progress in both subjects during this key stage. Leaders' actions to revise and strengthen the key stage 3 curriculum in mathematics and science, with particular consideration of the most-able pupils' needs, have underpinned this improvement. Teachers do not needlessly repeat work which these pupils have already mastered at primary school. They learn about new topics or revisit them in a more challenging way. In science, the key stage 3 curriculum routinely provides the most-able pupils with opportunities to think deeply about their learning and apply this in new and creative ways. As a result, they make strong progress. In mathematics, this approach is less well developed. However, the progress of the most-able pupils is effective in mathematics because the topics

which they cover over the key stage are challenging and appropriately sequenced.

- The third aspect that we investigated was whether leaders have introduced systems to monitor and support pupils' good behaviour since the last inspection. We looked at those systems which are now in place, with a specific focus on boys' behaviour. We found that you and other leaders have been fully effective in securing the improvements which were outlined at the last inspection.
- Staff and parents can monitor pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in each lesson of the day. The parents with whom we spoke were extremely positive about this. They say that they like the daily opportunity to reward or support their children's behaviour. Leaders monitor and use the information provided effectively to determine patterns of behaviour. Leaders demonstrated the positive impact of actions taken to support boys' good behaviour. Overall, pupils' behaviour is good.
- The last inspection asked you to ensure that all staff have high expectations of the way in which pupils present their work. We found that the actions which you have taken have been fully effective in making the improvements required. Pupils take great pride in their work, presenting it with care and accuracy across the range of subjects and key stages. For example, in science, charts, graphs and diagrams are constructed precisely. In modern foreign languages we noted that pupils take care to write words with the correct accents and verb endings. This attention to detail acts to strengthen pupils' progress.
- The final area that we considered was whether you have improved the teaching of literacy since the last inspection. We found that literacy is taught well across the school, including for those pupils who are the most able and for students in the sixth form. Staff are aware that these pupils require opportunities to enhance their already strong literacy skills and they regularly provide these. Teachers consistently take the opportunity to introduce and model appropriate subject-specific terminology. Pupils are encouraged to use these terms during writing or speaking activities. As a result, they use these terms with accuracy and in the correct context, and they remember them. Pupils are regularly provided with opportunities to write and speak at length and with detail. Most teachers are skilled in encouraging pupils to communicate with confidence and fluency, while also assessing and supporting pupils' good use of standard English. Teachers are also effective in spotting any misconceptions pupils have with spelling, punctuation or grammar and helping them overcome these. As a result, pupils' literacy is good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve
- they continue to strengthen the key stage 3 curriculum in mathematics, so that pupils are provided with more opportunities to think hard and apply their learning creatively.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings were held with you, other school leaders and governors. We also met with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views on a variety of issues, including safeguarding, equality, bullying and behaviour. We examined a range of the school's documentation such as the self-evaluation, the improvement plan, assessment information, attendance and behaviour records, the pupil premium funding plans and safeguarding information. We considered 167 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and 114 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility. We took account of 55 responses to the survey of pupils and 88 responses to the staff survey. We conducted learning walks across a range of subjects and year groups. We scrutinised the work in a sample of pupils' books by undertaking a work analysis with school leaders.