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9 July 2018

Mr George Panayiotou
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Panayiotou

Short inspection of Castleford Academy

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2018 with George Gilmore, Ofsted Inspector, and Janet Gabanski, 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your associate headteacher are relentless about improving the school and the quality of education provided. You focus on the needs of the pupils, students, and the local community and provide an education which meets those needs. As a result, since the last inspection, attendance has risen and the progress made by all pupils and students has improved even further. Information about pupils and students is used positively in lessons to ensure that pupils and students are challenged by the work they are given. You are highly ambitious for every pupil and student in the school and are determined that they are provided with the best possible education. However, you have not just focused on the education provided in lessons. You focus on each pupil and student to help to provide what they need. This, in some cases, means college courses, in others, support with rugby trips to Australia. The relationships between staff and pupils and students are highly positive. You, the staff and governors, care about the pupils and students who attend Castleford Academy.

You have honestly and openly reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the

school. As a result, you have in place highly comprehensive development plans. These are linked to the progress of pupils and students. The development plans are reviewed regularly, and concerns are picked up in a timely manner. In addition, regular and purposeful line management meetings with middle leaders ensure that all are focused on the progress made by pupils and students.

The trust and governors work very well together to ensure that you are challenged and supported in your role. They fully support your vision and share your ambition for the school. Governors are highly skilled and are, as you are, open and honest about what needs to be done. The governors benefit from your succinct but detailed reports. These allow the governors to be fully aware of the quality of education in the school. Governors proactively attend training, and the impact of this can be seen in the governing body minutes, its development plan and the knowledge the governing body has of the school.

Pupils and students want to come to school. They wear their uniform with pride. The school environment is very clean and highly motivating. Pupils' and students' achievements, academic, sporting or theatrical, are displayed prominently. Pupils and students are respectful to each other, staff and visitors. Policies relating to behaviour are used consistently well, which means that all members of the community are safe and able to achieve their very best.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is effective and includes all staff and governors. No one is complacent about safeguarding. You are fully aware that 'it could happen here' and you have policies and procedures in place to ensure that pupils and students are kept safe. Pupils and students stated that they feel safe and there is someone they trust and can speak to. They appreciate the support they can access, if they need to. When issues arise, highly appropriate and swift action is taken to ensure the safety of the pupils and students involved.

You have carefully reviewed the possible risks that pupils and students may face in the locality. Drop down days, when the curriculum is suspended to allow time for the pupils and students to explore issues in depth, and a highly valued social, moral, spiritual and cultural programme provide pupils and students with the knowledge to tackle the risks they may face.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, you were asked to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. You have put in place a robust approach to attendance, focusing sharply on the groups of pupils and students who are at risk of lower attendance. Simple but highly effective strategies, which involve parents and carers, have led to significant improvements in attendance. Exclusions have fallen as other strategies are used. Exclusions are now seen as the last resort and are rarely used. A strong focus on improving behaviour and making lessons engaging for all

pupils and students has contributed both to increasing attendance and reducing exclusions.

- The sixth form was newly in place at the last inspection. It was set up to provide sixth-form education for students who wanted to stay at the school and do courses which would enable them to move on to employment, further education or training. There are a small number of vocational courses on offer, combined with re-sit GCSEs in mathematics and English, as required. Students feel very well supported in the sixth form. They, like other pupils in the school, appreciate 'drop down days' and the opportunities to discuss difficult topics in a safe environment. The progress they make has improved and is being sustained. Students who need to re-sit their GCSEs in English and/or mathematics receive the support they need to enable them to do so. Students who do resit are very successful, which gives them more options when they complete their courses. As a result, the proportion of students who leave and do not go to further education, training or employment is extremely small. However, you are not complacent about the sixth form. You know its strengths and weaknesses and have in place development plans to improve it further.
- At the last inspection, you were asked to close the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made considerably more progress than other pupils nationally. This was achieved through a wide range of strategies and very effective spending of the pupil premium money. You and the governors are adamant that if 'they are not here they cannot learn'. Therefore, part of the strategy on attendance was specifically focused at disadvantaged pupils. In addition, in lessons, disadvantaged pupils are helped and supported as needed. Issues faced by disadvantaged pupils are dealt with discretely ensuring that these pupils can participate fully in school life. As a result, the difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school is considerably smaller than it was and is continuing to close.
- In 2017, boys and pupils who receive support for their special educational needs (SEN) made less progress in English than their peers. A whole-school literacy policy, embedded across the school, has helped to develop these pupils' literacy levels and their knowledge of technical language. Higher expectations of boys in English, combined with opportunities for boys to develop their literacy skills and extended writing skills, are improving the progress that boys make. The differences between progress made by boys and that of girls are diminishing across the school. However, you are determined that these differences will continue to diminish. Quality support by the majority of learning support assistants means that pupils who have SEN are making better progress especially in English. Pupils and students who are deaf or have hearing impairments are extremely well supported. These pupils and students are fully included in the life of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed fully the strategies in the development plans for the sixth form
- the work on diminishing the differences between the progress made by boys in English and that made by girls is continued.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspection team met with you, members of your senior leadership team, members of the governing body and members of the trust. Inspectors met with pupils formally and spoke with many pupils informally at social times and in lessons. The inspection team visited a number of lessons in a range of subjects and in different year groups. All of these visits were carried out with members of the senior leadership team. Pupils' and students' work was looked at to consider their progress over time. Inspectors looked at documentation concerning the progress made by different groups of pupils, behaviour, attendance, exclusions, documentation presented to the governing body and safeguarding information. The school's website was also reviewed. The 140 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and a letter sent to the inspection team were considered. The 84 responses to the staff questionnaire and the one response to the pupil questionnaire were taken into account.