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Miss Pippa Dodgshon
Principal
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Dear Miss Dodgshon

Short inspection of Hall Cross Academy

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2018 with Philip Riozzi, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Mary Lanovy-Taylor, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong and principled leadership has created a can-do culture of aspiration across the school which improves the life chances of your pupils. You are 'committed to the mission', as you put it, and pupils, staff and parents and carers respect you for this. You are justifiably proud of the achievements of all your pupils and of the inclusive nature of the school. Your school self-evaluation is accurate and you know the school's strengths as well as the areas in which you still need to improve. You have implemented a range of strategies to address these areas and you have built a team of senior leaders who share your vision and determination to improve the school further.

You have taken clear actions to address the areas for improvement identified at the school's previous inspection. The progress of students in the sixth form has improved and is now broadly in line with national averages and with the progress of pupils in key stages 3 and 4. You have introduced effective systems to ensure that sixth-form students' understanding in lessons is checked regularly and that learning is adapted through activities which keep the level of challenge high. Teachers use information about students' achievement systematically to pitch lessons at the right level. Leaders track students' achievement at key stage 5 closely. They are aware of areas for improvement and they take action swiftly to address underperformance.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have introduced an effective system to make checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment which requires all

teachers to use pupil-performance information to inform their lesson planning. Leaders have also established a culture across the school where teachers are observed more regularly than they were in the past. This has allowed leaders to support teachers in improving their practice through evaluating the effect upon learning within lessons. As you are aware, there is still work to be done to ensure that some teachers focus more specifically on the direct effect of teaching upon learning, particularly in English.

Middle leaders are now able to hold teachers to account for pupils' progress in their areas of responsibility in a way that they were not previously. The monitoring system which you have introduced is built into teachers' performance management and requires middle leaders to conduct termly reviews of all aspects of the quality of teaching in their departments. This is done through drop-in observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of progress information. Middle leaders work alongside teachers in securing improvements to the quality of teaching in most subjects. Both teachers and middle leaders feel challenged and accountable through this system. Although this approach is not consistently embedded across school, in the vast majority of departments it has led to a clear improvement in the accountability of teachers.

Pupil absence and persistent absence rates across the school have been rising compared to national averages. You have been proactive in introducing effective systems to improve the attendance of pupils across the school. These have now begun to show a positive effect. Consequently, both absence and persistent absence rates are now starting to improve. You are aware of the importance of improving attendance rates further across the school and have clear plans in place to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that there is an effective culture of safeguarding. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know which staff to approach if they have an issue or a concern and they are confident that they will be helped to resolve it. The designated safeguarding lead is meticulous in ensuring that all staff, including governors and those who are new to the school, are fully trained in their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. As a result, staff are fully aware of what they should do if they have a safeguarding concern of any kind. The vast majority of parents who responded to the parent survey said that their children feel safe at school.

Pupils have been taught about a wide range of safeguarding issues through life lessons at key stages 3 and 4 and through academic tutorials at key stage 5. These include how to stay safe on the internet and the risks of drug and alcohol abuse. Pupils are able to explain in some detail what they have learned during these lessons. Pupils say that bullying does not occur widely in school. Where it does happen, teachers generally take swift action to deal with it appropriately.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have introduced strategies which have begun to improve pupils' progress in English and to ensure that teachers are accountable for the outcomes of the pupils they teach. Governors are supportive of the action which has been taken to make improvements in English. However, in the past they have not challenged leaders to improve performance sufficiently.
- The level of challenge that we saw in English lessons was generally appropriate, especially for both middle-attaining and the most able pupils. However, we agreed that teachers could adapt their teaching more specifically to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly lower-attaining pupils. Evidence in books showed that pupils are making improving progress over time in the subject and that teachers are starting to help them to do so. Current assessment information suggests that there has been an improvement in pupils' progress in English, though there remains a difference compared to other pupils nationally, particularly in the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Following advice from an external consultant, leaders have made significant changes to the teaching of literacy in Year 7. These lessons now build upon skills which have been developed at key stage 2 and pupils are making improved progress as a result. For example, in a lesson about similes and metaphors, pupils were able to develop their use of imagery because of very specific targets that they were given for improvement.
- Teaching in the sixth form is effective and teachers use assessment information about students' levels of attainment well, to set work which is appropriately challenging. Questioning is probing and helps students to develop their understanding quickly. In a Spanish lesson visited, for example, the teacher used follow-up questions to deepen students' grammatical understanding. The difficulty of these questions was skilfully adapted to ensure that the level of challenge was appropriate to each individual.
- Students speak very enthusiastically about their experience in the sixth form. They say that they are well supported by their academic tutors through the advice and guidance that they are offered and they are very positive about the way in which assessment and tracking systems help them to make progress.
- You have introduced a system of using baseline assessment and pupils' end-of-Year-6 scaled scores to measure pupils' progress across the curriculum. This is having a positive effect in helping teachers to plan lessons which are appropriately challenging for all pupils, especially in mathematics and English.
- The 'disadvantaged first' initiative, which you have introduced to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils across the curriculum, is having a positive effect. Disadvantaged pupils are mentored by leaders to address potential barriers to learning and this is then communicated to all subject teachers, who adapt lesson planning accordingly. There is evidence of improvement in the progress of disadvantaged pupils across all year groups and across most subjects, when compared to that seen in the 2016/17 academic year, though you know that there is still work to be done here.

- Leaders are beginning to find alternative strategies to address poor behaviour. For example, after a classroom was damaged, leaders took a restorative community service approach and the pupils who were responsible worked alongside the school site team for a period of time. Consequently, the number of fixed-term exclusions is beginning to reduce, though it remains above the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- You have introduced effective systems to improve attendance. As a result, rates of absence and persistent absence are reducing but they remain higher than the national average and the absence rate of disadvantaged pupils is still high. Recently, leaders have targeted a small but substantial group of disadvantaged pupils whose absence was high and this has been very successful in improving their attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- effective systems are established to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in English, particularly of disadvantaged pupils
- levels of absence and fixed-term exclusions are reduced by embedding the recent strategies which have begun to address these areas
- governors rigorously hold leaders to account for the rate of improvement made in addressing the school's priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Timothy Johnson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, the head of sixth form, a group of governors and a group of students from key stage 5. We met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and we spoke informally with pupils around the school. We met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance, the curriculum and the pupil premium funding. We also met with the special educational needs coordinator, the leaders for English, a group of teachers and a group of other subject leaders. We completed 22 visits to lessons, including 11 visits with senior leaders, to consider pupils' progress and learning. During these visits, we spoke with pupils about what they were learning and about their progress. We also looked in detail at pupils' books, with senior leaders present. I considered the 55 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I also

reviewed the 49 responses to the staff survey. The school's policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding records, attendance and exclusions information, assessment information and other documents available on the school website.