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Mr David Bell
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Dear Mr Bell

Short inspection of The Joseph Whitaker School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2019 with Ofsted Inspectors Harkireet Sohel, Stephen Long and Steven Barnes, 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 second short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in December 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 the leadership team, together with governors and trust leaders, are aspirational for the school and are determined to realise future improvements and success. Through leaders' regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, your evaluation of the school is detailed and accurate. You know the school's strengths and areas that require further development. Your plans to address the areas that need to improve are well prioritised, regularly reviewed and supported by clear success criteria. Governors share your determination to ensure that the school's provision fully meets pupils' learning and welfare needs. Governors have a good understanding of the effectiveness of the school's provision, through the information they receive from leaders, discussion at meetings and from their visits to the school. They use their skills and experience to support the work of leaders and provide challenge, when necessary, to hold them to account.

A distinctive strength of the school is the welcoming and inclusive ethos which is fully supportive of fundamental British values. The school's mantra 'proud to be me, proud to be us' is reflected in the positive attitudes and behaviours displayed by pupils and the very positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils.

Following the previous inspection, pupils' overall progress by the end of key stage 4

has remained above average. The progress made by girls and middle-ability pupils in 2018 was good. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved. The progress made by boys and disadvantaged pupils, however, is not as strong. Boys make differing rates of progress across different subjects. In 2018, for example, the progress made by boys was good in science and mathematics but weaker in English, modern languages and some option subjects. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils performed better in science and humanities compared to English and mathematics. You have rightly identified the achievement of these groups as a priority for improvement and new initiatives have recently been implemented to advance the progress made by these groups. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of these developments on current pupils.

At the last inspection, leaders were challenged by inspectors to strengthen subject leadership and share the most effective practice. Your leadership in this area has ensured that the professional development of staff is at the core of school improvement. Staff have clear expectations about their performance. These expectations are underpinned by strong support and opportunities for development that appropriately meet the needs of individual staff. The school's open culture enables staff to share their expertise within the school and across the wider trust. Staff report that they are very appreciative of the opportunities to share effective practice within a supportive school and trust culture. Staff morale is exceptionally positive.

Staff, parents, carers and the clear majority of pupils hold very positive views about the school. One parent expressed opinions shared by many others: 'The school is a real comprehensive and staff work very hard to create a very positive and inclusive school community.' Pupils are happy and proud to be members of the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey would recommend the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You lead safeguarding well and have ensured that the policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are effective. A culture of vigilance exists because leaders are well informed, follow rigorous procedures and are proactive in the best interests of children. Appropriate checks are made on all staff and volunteers to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. You have ensured that regular training is provided to keep staff updated on procedures and potential safeguarding risks. Consequently, all staff understand what do to if they have a concern about a pupil's well-being.

Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding pupils ensure that their record keeping is of a good quality. Effective processes are in place to follow up issues as they arise in a timely and appropriate way. School leaders work well with a range of external support agencies to make sure that pupils at risk of harm are kept safe, including those attending programmes of learning at alternative locations. The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe, including learning about online safety and substance abuse.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they are well cared for. They know who they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns and are appreciative of the support they receive. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey agree. Pupils also reported that the school has a strong inclusive atmosphere and they recognise the support that is extended to those pupils who need it most. The establishment of the school's 'Learning and Inclusion Centre (Linc)', for example, provides specific, tailored support to identified pupils with respect to their physical, emotional and mental well-being.

Pupils report that bullying is rare and that any occurrences are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. School records reflect this. Leaders have embarked upon a new anti-bullying strategy and pupils have been recruited to act as anti-bullying ambassadors. The school intends to be accredited with the 'Diana Award' in recognition of its anti-bullying strategy.

Inspection findings

- The leadership of the sixth form is effective. The attainment of students is good overall. Although the progress made by students dipped in 2018, leaders' decisive actions have ensured that current students are making stronger progress. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum offered meets the needs, abilities and aspirations of students. Included in this are new vocational courses such as the diploma in sports studies. Students who spoke to the lead inspector are proud to be part of the sixth form and speak very positively about their learning experiences and the facilities available to them. Attendance in the sixth form is high and this is closely monitored. Leaders have implemented a comprehensive personal development and enrichment programme which complements students' study programmes. For example, students learn about current affairs, first aid and personal finance. Together with a clear programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance, students are well placed for their next steps in learning. As a consequence, all students are able to secure appropriate placements in education, employment or training by the end of the sixth form.
- Leaders have implemented a well-considered and effective programme for careers education to support the personal development of pupils. As a result, a very high proportion of pupils secure places in further education or training by the end of key stage 4. Pupils who responded to the school's pupil survey were particularly positive about the support and guidance they receive to make informed decisions.
- Pupils behave well around the school site and during lessons. Their attitudes in lessons are positive and low-level disruption is rare. Levels of attendance are high and above the national average. There is a strong and supportive ethos based on the school's key values of inclusion and the acceptance of diversity. Pupils have embraced these values through projects such as 'Stonewall Champions', which has helped to eliminate the use of any derogatory language. Pupils' leadership of this project has enabled the school to be successfully accredited with the bronze level award in recognition of the integrity of the school's inclusive community atmosphere.

- Alternative provision for pupils at risk of disengaging from learning is effective and well managed. The partnership between school leaders and providers is strong and, as a result, pupils attend and behave well. These pupils are making good progress.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils with SEND is effective. As a result of closer support for pupils, strengthening links between curriculum subjects and positive engagement with parents and external agencies, these pupils are now making better progress than in previous years. The school's 'bridge' facility to support pupils' transition into the school, for example, is purposeful and effective in enabling pupils to catch up in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is generally well planned and teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this to question pupils and generally probe their understanding effectively. In lessons pupils are usually well engaged and follow instructions from their teachers promptly. However, inspectors observed variations in the extent to which pupils, especially boys and disadvantaged pupils, apply themselves to their learning. Inspectors found that this was particularly apparent when learning activities required a deeper level of thinking in response to extended written tasks.
- Pupils are typically positive about the range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school. These include a range of opportunities to take part in sports, performing arts and technology, for example. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is popular. Pupils and parents are particularly enthusiastic about the 'Brilliant Club' to stretch and challenge more-able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils make consistently strong progress across the curriculum, especially boys and disadvantaged pupils, by applying their understanding at greater depth in extended pieces of written work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you and other school leaders, trust leaders and governors. Inspectors also met with subject leaders, the school's

coordinator for pupils with SEND and a small group of representative staff. Visits were made to 20 parts of lessons across all key stages, to observe learning and look at pupils' work. An additional scrutiny of pupils' work was undertaken from a representative sample in Years 8 and 10. Visits were also made to tutor time sessions and a house assembly. Discussions were held with four groups of pupils representing all year groups. A discussion took place with the school's designated safeguarding lead. The school's arrangements for safeguarding were examined, including record-keeping and the recruitment checks made on staff, staff training and the processes in place for referrals made to external agencies. Inspectors looked at records about attendance and behaviour and scrutinised a range of documentary evidence. These included the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, school policies and information about pupils' current attainment and progress.

The lead inspector considered the views of 190 parents through their response to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. He also considered the 61 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 506 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.