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Mrs Alison Pearson
Associate Headteacher
The Marches School
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Dear Mrs Pearson

Short inspection of The Marches School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018 with Huw Bishop and Herminder Channa, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of significant leadership changes. You have become associate headteacher. The previous headteacher is now the executive headteacher of The Marches Multi-Academy Trust and many members of the leadership team are new. You have ensured that leadership responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear. This has strengthened the capacity of leadership. The school's sixth-form provision is now well established.

Leaders, including governors, are ambitious to achieve the very best for all pupils. You are committed to achieving this through the school's ethos of 'achievement through caring'. You display determination in securing continuous improvement and have accurately identified improvement areas. Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of your priorities. You have made sure that achievement is good for most pupils.

Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum. A much higher proportion of pupils are entered for the English Baccalaureate than nationally. The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieving the English Baccalaureate in 2017 was above the national average. Alongside academic and vocational studies, the wider curriculum and the school's employment and further education programme are supporting pupils to develop resilience and positive attitudes to learning.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the progress of pupils in English. You have organised professional development to strengthen teachers' knowledge of this subject. As a result, pupils' achievement in English has improved and is now good. In addition, leaders were recommended to sharpen the quality of the school's self-evaluation. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and takes into account the performance of pupils over time. Discussions with leaders, including governors, indicate the clear view leaders have of how well the school is doing and what needs to improve further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. Records, including confidential records, are detailed and of a high quality. Policies and practice reflect the latest guidance. Leaders who have specific responsibilities for safeguarding are clear about their roles and responsibilities. You have ensured that staff, including staff new to the school, are aware of the risks pupils face and follow clear procedures when they have concerns. As a result, leaders and staff understand what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety or welfare. School records show that, when staff have had cause to act, they have done so in a proportionate and timely manner.

There is a positive, calm and orderly atmosphere in lessons and around the school.

Pupils are confident that there is an adult to talk to if they have a worry or concern. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe and well cared for. They explained how teachers use tutor time to provide them with useful information and strategies to stay safe in a variety of settings. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of different types of abuse and how to stay safe online. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted online survey Parent View believe their child is safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- Through effective self-evaluation, you have identified the progress of disadvantaged pupils as a priority area for improvement. You organised an external review of this area and leaders have responded swiftly to the recommendations in the report. For example, they have sharpened their focus on the key barriers to learning facing the school's disadvantaged pupils. In addition, leaders have introduced new whole-school strategies to improve the progress and attainment of this group of pupils. You frequently check that these strategies are having an impact on the progress of this group of pupils. As a result, the difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally diminished in 2017. Current information provided by school leaders and work in pupils' books indicate that the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve across all year groups. You know that there is still some variability in this across different subjects and classes. You are keeping a careful eye on this and are taking appropriate actions to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make strong progress across the curriculum.

- During the inspection, inspectors saw clear evidence of most teachers using effective approaches to ensure that disadvantaged pupils were engaged and challenged in lessons. For example, in a Year 10 business studies lesson, the teacher used questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils developed their knowledge and understanding of how businesses recruit well.
- You have taken effective action to further improve achievement across all subjects. This has included developing more rigorous systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. In addition, you have ensured that teachers make regular and accurate checks on how well pupils are doing. As a result, current performance information indicates that pupils are making strong progress in the subjects of their own choice.
- You have introduced robust procedures for monitoring the quality of the sixth-form provision. As a result, leaders of the sixth form have a comprehensive understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Teaching is strong in most subjects, with effective questioning and frequent assessment taking place. For example, in a Year 12 mathematics lesson, students were expected to think hard as their teacher asked them to give reasons for the use of confidence intervals. Current performance information provided by leaders shows that pupils are on track to achieve outcomes in line with national averages.
- Students in the sixth form speak highly of the quality of provision they receive. They feel well supported by their teachers. For example, one student commented that, 'teachers are always willing to help'. They appreciate and enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities provided for them.
- Leaders have ensured that sixth-form students have received helpful information and advice about their future ambitions. As a result, most students in the sixth form are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Latest destination data presents a strong and improving picture, with all students going on to appropriate education, employment or training.
- Pupils benefit from a variety of career-related activities provided for them. More pupils now have the opportunity to participate in work experience. Pupils in Year 11 spoke to inspectors about how their work experience placement in Year 10 had helped them to consider possible future careers. However, the quality of careers provision is variable across the school. A minority of pupils do not feel well prepared for the next stages of their education, training or employment. Leaders have recognised the need to improve this provision further. They have re-designed the careers curriculum to ensure that pupils make strong progress in their careers education throughout the school. However, it is too early to assess the impact of these changes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teachers ensure that disadvantaged pupils are engaged and challenged in their learning so that they make strong progress and achieve well
- careers education is delivered consistently well across the school so that all pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

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 Shropshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Stevens
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. I also met with the chair of the local governing body and the chair of the board of trustees. Inspectors visited a range of lessons in all key stages. We met formally with groups of pupils and we spoke informally to them in lessons. We observed behaviour in lessons and during the school day. Inspectors examined documents, including information about the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, minutes of meetings from the local governing body and information about pupils' achievements. Inspectors considered 116 responses completed this year to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 115 additional written responses. Inspectors also reviewed 85 responses to the staff questionnaire and 442 responses to the pupil questionnaire.