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Mr Adrian Larkin
Principal
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Dear Mr Larkin

Short inspection of Cloughwood Academy

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 2016 with Caroline Pollard, 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 outstanding in February 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have maintained your relentless focus on teaching and learning. You, your staff and directors are committed to securing the best possible outcomes for all your pupils. Your insistence on older pupils following well-regarded courses leading to higher level qualifications, exacting standards of presentation in pupils' books and a calm, orderly environment are testament to your ambition.

From the warm welcome pupils receive when they arrive at school in the morning, to the sensitive way in which you support them through personal crises and the pride you share in their achievements, you and your staff make Cloughwood a special place for each and every pupil.

You and your vice principals have the confidence of staff, pupils, parents and the directors. Staff appreciate your high profile around school and know that you will always provide support where needed. You regularly engage pupils in discussions about their learning and are interested in their views about the school. You ensure that parents are kept up to date with their children's progress.

Staff and pupils are confident to share their ideas to make the school even better. They know that you will listen to them and carefully consider their suggestions. Everyone feels that they have an important part to play in the success of

Cloughwood. Members of the board of directors make sure that they visit the school regularly so that they know the school well. There is an open and honest dialogue between directors and senior leaders. Together, you have developed a shared vision for your school which is understood by all staff, pupils and parents.

You have not rested on your laurels since the last inspection. Recognising the need to offer provision for younger pupils, you have established two key stage 2 classes. The outstanding quality of teaching in these two classes makes sure that your youngest pupils get off to a flying start. The board of directors has increased the number of members, recruiting new members, including two parents, with the skills, experience and expertise which were needed to further strengthen the strategic leadership of the school. Directors are using findings from a recent audit to make sure that they continue to improve their effectiveness.

At the time of the last inspection there were a number of pupils who were persistently absent. The majority of current pupils have good rates of attendance. In some year groups, attendance is well above the national average. A few pupils in Year 8 and Year 10 do not attend as regularly as their peers; however, the overwhelming majority have greatly improved their attendance since joining the school. Often these pupils refused to attend their previous schools. You have carefully assessed the reasons for the recent decline in attendance in Year 11. You then decided to appoint instructors for motivational outdoor learning. They know pupils extremely well and offer individual support programmes to maintain pupils' engagement in school. This has made a positive difference to most pupils. You have already identified further changes you will make to the organisation of the key stage 4 curriculum to maintain pupils' good attendance.

You have made sure that all pupils know what they are expected to achieve in each lesson. Teachers explain what the pupils will be learning at the start of each lesson and encourage pupils to evaluate their own success using a checklist. Strong teacher subject knowledge, high expectations for behaviour and lessons which enthuse, help pupils to make rapid gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils find teachers' marking and feedback helpful; their work provides clear evidence that they act on the advice given.

Following the last inspection you and your staff set to work to improve pupils' writing. You quickly addressed the way in which you taught writing. For example, you used visitors and trips to give pupils a range of stimuli to encourage their writing as well as increasing the opportunities for pupils to write across the curriculum. However, this did not achieve the level of improvement for which you had hoped. You were not deterred. You and your staff were resolute in your determination to identify what was the root cause of pupils' weaknesses in writing. You identified pupils' difficulties in understanding what they were reading and writing down as the key issue. You put in place interventions which helped pupils quickly acquire the skills to read age-appropriate texts accurately and fluently. You then set about training every teacher to be accomplished in teaching pupils the skills of reading comprehension. As a result, pupils are now practising these skills in all their lessons. These improvements in pupils' reading skills have made a positive difference to their abilities as writers.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team make safeguarding a high priority. Staff regularly attend training and understand their roles and responsibilities well. The designated safeguarding lead is meticulous in following up every referral. The school's business manager ensures that checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough. Pupils are unanimous that they are safe and well cared for. Any incidents of bullying, including racist and homophobic name-calling, are swiftly addressed by staff. Staff make sure that pupils understand the reasons why these behaviours are not acceptable; therefore, these types of incidents are very rare among the older pupils. Staff are exceptionally well trained to manage the needs of pupils. When a pupil is in crisis, staff skilfully de-escalate the situation and ensure that all pupils are kept safe. The curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe, such as how to distinguish between healthy and harmful sexual behaviours.

Inspection findings

- When pupils join your school almost all have fallen well behind their peers in their learning. Pupils settle in quickly, responding well to the high expectations set for their behaviour. Teachers work in partnership with the special educational needs intervention team to address any identified learning difficulties to help pupils catch up quickly. Other pupils provide excellent role models and are keen to help new pupils learn how things are done at Cloughwood. Pupils who spoke to inspectors all said how much they enjoyed school now and described dramatic improvements in their behaviour and academic achievement since joining the school.
- Pupils speak highly of the staff at the school. They enjoy the lessons their teachers plan; for example, Year 11 pupils enthusiastically responded to an article about the rapper, Tinie Tempah. They developed their skills in understanding increasingly complex texts. As a result, pupils quickly develop very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils settle quickly to task, contribute ideas, listen attentively to their teachers and take pride in their work. Staff take time to build positive relationships with pupils. Pupils respond well to the kindness shown to them by staff.
- The investment in training for teachers and support staff has paid dividends. Staff are continually honing their skills and knowledge so that they are able to best meet the diverse needs of the pupils in the school. The consistency with which staff follow the behaviour, safeguarding, and teaching and learning policies makes a significant contribution to the school's success. Teachers and support staff were keen to share how their training on reading comprehension was making a positive difference to pupils' learning in their different subjects.
- From their different starting points, pupils make good progress during their time at Cloughwood. Pupils in key stage 2 get off to a flying start. Teachers' high expectations, lessons which engage and enthuse pupils as well as an emphasis on pupils acquiring key skills in literacy and numeracy stand pupils in good stead for the demands of the key stage 3 curriculum. Teachers seize every opportunity to teach the pupils how to be good citizens. Pupils quickly

learn the values of tolerance and respect, so are kind and considerate towards each other.

- Many of the pupils join the school after the beginning of Year 9. This presents considerable challenges as the gap between the academic attainment of these pupils and their peers nationally can be considerable. Despite this challenge, leaders and directors set high expectations. All pupils follow a curriculum which leads them towards GCSE courses in English, mathematics, physical education, history, art and information and communications technology as well as a vocational qualification in science. In 2015, Year 11 pupils achieved notable success in science, physical education, history and information and communications technology. Pupils also achieved a higher standard in mathematics and English than in previous years. The quality of art work displayed around the school is testament to pupils' success in this subject. All pupils moved on to attend college, start work or become an apprentice when they left the school in 2014 and 2015.
- The vice principal, who is in charge of assessment and tracking, oversees the progress of all pupils. Teachers use the information they gather on a daily basis to inform their planning for individuals as well as groups. Any pupils who need additional specialist support are swiftly identified and interventions put in place. As a result, all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve well from their different starting points. Following extensive consultation and research by leaders to develop the school's approach to assessment without levels, staff are attending training this half term. The school's new measures of pupils' attainment and progress will be fully implemented by the end of this academic year.
- The school provides pupils with many experiences which complement their academic learning and help them develop into well-rounded individuals. The daily enrichment session gives pupils the opportunity to develop new interests and hobbies, including trampolining and dog walking as well as developing key life skills such as cycling. On the day of the inspection, the football team won two matches in an inter-schools' tournament. The whole school showed their pride in this achievement and are looking forward to the next round which is to be played at the prestigious Goodison Park. Five Year 11 pupils have recently achieved their bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- The school offers an extended day and residential provision. All pupils have access to this and many choose to take advantage of this offer. Pupils talked enthusiastically about the range of fun activities which they can take part in, such as swimming. Pupils appreciate the care shown to them by staff and know that staff will always make time to talk to them and help them when they are worried about anything. Pupils feel that this helps them to be more successful in school.
- The school works hard to build relationships with parents and carers. Staff provide regular updates on pupils' learning and behaviour so that parents know how well their children are doing. Parents appreciate the support the school gives to families, particularly when they are faced with challenges. A number of parents have signed up to the school's first parenting course which is starting this month. Parents who spoke to inspectors hold the school in high regard. They all talked about the noticeable improvements in their child's progress, behaviour and attitudes to learning since their child had joined

Cloughwood.

- Leaders and directors have an ambitious vision for the school which is shared by staff, pupils and parents. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school extremely well and work tirelessly to move the school from strength to strength.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further develop their skills and expertise in teaching reading and writing across the curriculum so that pupils' achievement in English at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 continues to improve
- the school continues to review the reasons for the recent decline in attendance at Year 11 and put in place actions to reverse this trend.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors, 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

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met with you and your vice principals, acting head of care, teaching and support staff, the chair of the board of directors and other members. I also spoke with an independent consultant who works with the school. We spoke with pupils in lessons, around school and in meetings. There were no responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, so we spoke to four parents. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and look at their work. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. I conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe, training, recruitment checks and record-keeping.