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Mr Christopher Catherall
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Dear Mr Catherall

Short inspection of Academy@Worden

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016 with Kathleen Harris, 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 your school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to establish a purposeful and thriving school, carefully selecting and building a strong team of expert teachers and leaders. This team is now securing a good quality of education for a rapidly increasing number of pupils who are choosing to be educated at Academy@Worden. You have built a strong culture of accountability; most of the areas of improvement from the last inspection have been tackled effectively. You have been relentless in your focus on ensuring that teachers and leaders are highly skilled and well prepared to deal with the varied needs of each year group. Pupils benefit from good teaching in most classes and subjects. Pupils leave the school with brighter prospects due to a passionate and driven leadership team working alongside teachers who care and meticulously plan for each unique cohort and the challenges that prevail. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and adapted to support the needs of pupils who enter the school. Your leaders prepare well for frequent high numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those with low attainment on entry. Pupils remain at the heart of any planned school change.

Leaders and teachers know their pupils well and ensure that a purposeful thriving environment is provided to support high-quality learning. You have a small school that provides a wealth of opportunities for all pupils. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and build new skills. For example, there is a successful and popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme in place which enables pupils to make a significant contribution to their community and develop

wide-ranging skills and personal responsibility. You have established an ethos of harmony and respect for learning, which reflects the school's 'strapline' of 'Academy@Worden: a school to be proud of'. Your insistence upon teachers upholding the behaviour policy underpins and promotes a school where pupils can enjoy learning. Consequently the rate of exclusion of pupils has fallen and attendance has strengthened even further. Pupils take pride in their work and their school and develop raised aspirations from a good-quality learning environment.

You have been active in forging productive partnerships with a number of successful schools. These have allowed for swift identification of areas to improve and timely appropriate action to be undertaken when needed. You have ensured that leaders regularly seek and share good practice with others across the school and with leaders from other schools. External support has successfully raised teachers' standards and expectations, and continues to provide frequent opportunities to check teachers' judgements when they assess the standards of pupils' work. You have also judiciously used the expert support and advice of a national leader in education (NLE). This has sharpened and supported key curriculum areas, as well as providing a network of support for developing the skills of middle leaders. Consequently, all leaders have a strong capacity to further improve pupils' outcomes. Governors hold an accurate view of the school that is informed by the school's robust systems for tracking pupils' achievement. Your governors shine a light on any underperformance and insist on improvements that will continue to move the school forward.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. School leaders take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously and ensure appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited to the school. Staff and governors are well trained in child protection, and they rigorously ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe. You have ensured that teachers are familiar with strategies for protecting children against radicalisation. Pupils know whom to turn to for support, or if any concerns arise.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been broadly in line with national figures since the previous inspection. Performance in this key indicator dropped in 2015; this was a result of unique circumstances that impacted on a very small cohort. Despite this, pupils did still make good progress in English from their starting points and pupils' progress in mathematics was close to national figures. The proportions of current Key Stage 4 pupils on track to attain at least five GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C including English and mathematics are back in line with national figures.

- In 2016, pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics and English are set to improve. The information school leaders gather on the progress pupils are making is reliable; leaders have used their links with staff in local outstanding schools to verify accuracy. Improvements in English are greater than those in mathematics because of the comparative strength of teaching and the track record of established strong practitioners within the school. However, a more stable mathematics department is now established; rapid improvements have been seen in mathematics by inspectors.
- The uneven progress identified in the last inspection has been addressed by leaders and inconsistency reduced across the school, particularly at Key Stage 3. The vast majority of pupils are achieving their targets across a wide range of subjects at Key Stage 3.
- Progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is higher than the national average. They are well cared for, and make the progress of which they are capable because of consistent effective support.
- The most-able pupils in 2016 show more improvement in meeting expected progress in relation to their Key Stage 2 starting points than other pupils in their year.
- Disadvantaged pupils in 2015 made significantly better progress in meeting expectations in English and mathematics than other pupils nationally. Gaps are narrowing over time because leaders are using the pupil premium funding effectively and keep a 'close eye' on the performance of disadvantaged pupils across the school. However, the proportion making more than expected progress in mathematics falls short of the national figure. Nonetheless, improved teaching and new appointments in mathematics are leading to rapid improvements in current pupils' outcomes.
- In humanities, pupils have not achieved as well as they have in other subjects over recent years. However, new teachers are quickly improving outcomes in humanities subjects for pupils currently in the school.
- Science results are back on track and pupils are expected to perform in line with national figures for progress in 2016 and 2017. This is because leaders have ensured that new appointments and strong teaching are embedded across the science faculty.
- Pupils speak warmly of the efforts that staff make to look after them; strong pastoral care nurtures pupils. For example, the use of social support rooms, 'Butterfly and Diamonds rooms', ensures barriers to learning are removed for the most vulnerable pupils.
- Teachers and leaders have focused on improving pupils' literacy across the school through rich and diverse strategies to maximise success. Teachers regularly correct pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, and provide effective literacy support in the classroom. Reading is promoted well and pupils at Key Stage 3 use a 'reading journal' to track and celebrate their reading. As a consequence, their written work is improving across the school and academic performance in English is good compared to their prior attainment on entry. Leaders have not addressed numeracy with quite the

same passion and rigour. As a result, pupils' skills in numeracy are not as well developed as their literacy skills.

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high across the school. Pupils present their work well in their books; teachers encourage them to take pride in all they do. Pupils complete work that is well matched to their ability and respond frequently and effectively to teachers' feedback on how to improve their work.
- Strong relationships exist between teachers and pupils and consequently pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently high. Teachers use their knowledge about pupils to plan lessons that well match pupils' needs. The most able are challenged appropriately across subjects.
- Pupils are provided with good, well-structured, impartial careers advice to support their next steps. Consequently, the number of pupils going to a sustained education, employment or training provider is well above the national figure. Leaders and teachers support pupils to ensure destinations are sustained. Pupils are well supported and provided with a rich and diverse programme of careers education. For example, careers fairs are open to pupils in Year 8 onwards and Year 10 pupils are prepared well for their work experience week. Enterprise skills are developed and the school became national runners-up in the 'National Enterprise Challenge' 2015.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and are proud of their school. The ethos of the school is calm and built on respect for each other. All pupils spoken to by inspectors said that they felt safe in the school.
- Governors are loyal to the school and highly experienced. However, governors have not sharply checked that the school complies with publishing information on its website. As a result, they do not fully comply with regulations. Governors meet regularly and understand the challenges of a small school with a varying academic cohort. They are aware of the significant needs of a large number of pupils who enter the school with special educational needs and significantly low prior attainment from primary school. Governors have a strong focus on the key priorities for school improvement and they challenge school leaders effectively. They work alongside leaders in ensuring that appropriate training is available to support teachers so that the school is not reliant on 'quick fixes' to improve pupils' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the school complies with 'The School Information Regulations 2012', regarding publishing curriculum content information on its website
- the development of pupils' numeracy skills is further embedded across the school
- they capitalise on the successful new appointments in mathematics and science to further build upon attainment and progress

- attainment is raised further in humanities at Key Stage 4.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors undertook 'learning walks' and observed teaching and learning in many subjects and most year groups.
- Meetings took place with you, your deputy headteacher, senior and middle leaders, an officer from the local authority, the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors also spoke by telephone to a national leader of education who works closely with the school.
- Informal discussions were held with pupils at breaktime and around the school to gather views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in some pupils' books in lessons observed during the 'learning walks'.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance and information relating to pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), along with four responses to the online staff questionnaire and 179 responses to the online pupils' questionnaire.