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Mrs Sara Billins
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Billins

Short inspection of North Oxfordshire Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017 with Peter Rodin, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your school improvement plan identifies the correct priorities for further improvement. Your leadership team and the governors work effectively to ensure that the school remains at the heart of the community. Staff and pupils recognise that you are raising aspirations and encouraging pupils to be ambitious about their academic achievement, aided well by your focus on supporting their individual needs. As a result, there are now more pupils following advanced courses at the school and in Banbury College. You have been supported effectively by United Learning. For example, school subject leaders have drawn successfully on the expertise of the trust's subject advisers to improve teaching and learning.

There is a positive ethos throughout the school which is enhanced by strong relationships between staff and pupils. Staff know their pupils well because they focus on improving pupils' well-being and self-confidence. Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum and the range of extra-curricular opportunities provides further enrichment. For example, a number of key stage 3 pupils take part in an animal welfare club which is helping them understand how to be caring.

Effective leadership of teaching means that the majority of pupils make good progress. We agreed that many pupils join the school with achievement below that expected for their age, including some not yet ready to benefit from the school's curriculum because of their low literacy and numeracy skills and understanding.

From low starting points, most pupils do very well. However, disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they can in some subjects. In addition, some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified that more pupils could make outstanding progress if teachers provided a more suitable range of tasks and challenges to sustain the attention of pupils of all abilities in lessons. You have taken effective action in this area so that GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection in English, mathematics and science. You have invested in developing strong lead practitioners among the staff who adopt a can-do approach for pupils. Staff now plan engaging lessons using prior assessment information and match activities well to pupils' differing needs. Importantly, your new tracking system supports staff to identify where pupils are not making the progress you expect. Your bespoke programme of support is helping diminish any differences in pupils' attainment, especially at key stage 3. However, standards are lower in humanities and modern foreign languages by the end of key stage 4.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' welfare is made a priority throughout the school's work, leading to a strong culture of safeguarding. Specifically trained safeguarding staff and the leadership team ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors check that all processes and policies are up to date, and that school records are thorough and complete. The school's work in training staff and educating pupils about the risks of child exploitation and e-safety takes a high priority throughout the academic year.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and feel safe at school. Parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe at school. Pupils say that bullying is rare but is dealt with effectively should it occur. They are confident about who to go to if they have a concern.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; pupils' attendance; pupils' achievement, including that of disadvantaged pupils, boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities; pupils' progress in languages and humanities subjects; and the effectiveness of the school's sixth-form provision.
- You have correctly identified that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities needs to improve further. You have introduced a range of relevant interventions and your team works closely with a local authority educational welfare officer to improve the attendance of vulnerable groups. As a result, attendance has improved for these pupils. You welcome pupils who have struggled with school attendance before and work in a dedicated way with these families to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.

- You rightly identify that improvements achieved in teaching and learning are due to the effective work of your subject leaders, who ensure the consistent application of the school's helpful teaching, learning and assessment policy. Your subject leaders' relentless drive to improve teachers' planning and the quality of teaching is ensuring that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make improving progress. In the lessons we visited, we saw how most disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to others.
- Leaders have rightly identified that GCSE outcomes in 2016 were weaker in humanities and modern foreign languages. Leaders have drawn upon the strategies used to improve teaching in English, mathematics and science to strengthen outcomes in these subjects. Your geography leader is also working closely with the United Learning subject adviser to improve the curriculum so that teaching now stretches and challenges the most able pupils. However, there is still some variation in the quality of teaching in these subjects.
- Some of the pupils at your school have complex needs. You and the governors have invested heavily to improve welfare arrangements for these pupils, working closely with their families. Your home-school partnership intervention project, 'The Ship', helps small groups improve their attendance and self-esteem by improving their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. As a result, pupils who are part of this project are enjoying their learning and attending more frequently.
- You have correctly identified that weak literacy skills are the main barrier to success for many boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The additional literacy sessions run through Years 7 and 8 are particularly effective in preparing these pupils for the mainstream curriculum. Inspectors observed pupils in these sessions successfully reading and analysing texts, as well as following the school's spelling programme, which helps pupils improve this important skill.
- A valuable culture of reading exists within the school. Inspectors spoke to pupils in Year 8 who were all able to share what they were currently reading and discuss authors who had visited the school recently. Pupils are enthused by reading and most achieve well.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than their peers in some of their GCSE subjects. Leaders responsible for promoting the success of disadvantaged pupils have correctly identified the reasons for this. They ensure that teachers focus their attention effectively on this group of pupils. Leaders regularly track and monitor the progress of all pupils, and particularly the disadvantaged. As a result, the school's current assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils across key stage 3 are making progress similar to their peers in almost all subjects. Bespoke support for individual pupils is addressing these pupils' needs at key stage 4, but it is too early to measure the impact of this provision on pupils' progress.
- Leaders responsible for the sixth form have carefully adjusted the curriculum so it now matches the profile of the students and reflects the needs of the local community. Sixth-form leaders have identified their 'gold' standard which shares teachers' best practice to bring about improvements. This is also helping teachers to be more precise in the way they help students improve their work, thereby

improving pupils' achievement. Students appreciate the support they receive from the sixth-form team.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to improve
- disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups
- teaching and pupils' achievement improves quickly in modern foreign languages and humanities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive of United Learning, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, middle leaders, the chair of the local governing body and representatives from United Learning. We met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their learning. Inspectors visited lessons, in a range of subjects and year groups, with you and members of the leadership team. We looked at the school's documentation, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement, progress and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' minutes. We also checked the school's policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of pupil premium funding, and the curriculum. Inspectors considered 27 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 16 individual parent comments, and 51 responses to both the staff and pupil questionnaires provided by Ofsted.