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16 July 2019

Mr Bryn Heeley  
Headteacher  
The Whitby High School  
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Dear Mr Heeley

### **No formal designation inspection of The Whitby High School**

Following my visit with Tim Long, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9 July 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine the effectiveness of leaders' actions in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the school's recent section 5 inspection.

### **Evidence**

We met with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. We carried out observations of learning in a range of subjects and looked at pupils' work. Some of these activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. We spoke to pupils when we visited classrooms. We also met formally with a group of pupils from Years 7 to 10 and a group of Year 12 students to discuss their views of the school. We reviewed a number of documents, including the school's information about current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance records, and the school's improvement plan. We also checked the single central record and reviewed the school's safeguarding and child protection policies and practices.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time safeguarding is effective.

## **Context**

Whitby High School is a larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. There are 1,576 pupils at the school, including 191 students in the sixth form. The proportion of pupils that are eligible for free school meals is slightly lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is in the line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is broadly average.

Senior leaders and governors are in the process of increasing leadership capacity with a review of roles and recent appointments to leadership posts. Some changes have already been made to line-management responsibilities. From September 2019, there will be a new head of sixth form, lead practitioner in the English department, support teacher in the history department and an additional attendance officer. Building work is currently underway to provide a suite of new science laboratories and humanities rooms. The number of pupils who join the school in Year 7 is rising.

## **Main findings**

Leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in February 2019. Despite being disappointed with the outcome of the previous inspection, you, senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body have wasted no time in bringing about positive change. In part, this is because you are continuing to build upon many of the improvement strategies that were in place prior to the previous inspection. The improvement plan is focused on the right priorities to strengthen teaching and raise pupils' achievement. You have the support and commitment of staff. There is a shared goal to ensure that pupils at Whitby High benefit from a good-quality education.

Improving the quality of teaching across the school is a key priority. You are holding subject leaders to account more effectively for the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. Subject leaders spoke positively about the quality of the training and support that they have received to improve their leadership skills and teaching in their departments.

There are early signs of the positive impact of this work. Teachers' expectations of pupils are higher, and they are beginning to plan activities that match pupils' needs and abilities more closely than in the past. We found that teachers typically have

secure subject knowledge, which means they use questions well to probe pupils' knowledge and deepen their understanding.

The development of pupils' reading and writing skills now have a higher priority across the school. Reading continues to be promoted through form periods. In addition, students in the sixth form act as reading mentors for younger pupils to foster a love of reading. Pupils' work indicates that teachers are increasingly planning activities that give pupils greater opportunities to write longer pieces of work. This is building pupils' stamina and resilience. It is also encouraging them to work hard during their time in lessons.

You and your team have ensured that pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected when they produce work across different subjects. As a result, pupils are taking more pride in their work, which is neat and well presented. Pupils' technical accuracy in their writing is also improving. However, work in some books showed that pupils misspell key terms and their mistakes are not being systematically addressed.

Current assessment information indicates that the progress of Year 11 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, remains variable across subjects, including in English and history. Inspection evidence indicates that progress for current pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, is improving across a range of subjects in key stage 3. Pupils in Year 10 are faring much better than their peers in Year 11.

The curriculum has received considerable attention. In most subject areas, especially in key stage 3, it has been completely refreshed in preparation for the new academic year. You have ensured that curriculum development is grounded on relevant research and that it is structured effectively to build on pupils' prior learning. You have provided subject leaders with the time and resources to improve schemes of work so that pupils have the knowledge and understanding required to be successful in key stage 4 and in their later learning. Good use has been made of external support, especially in history and English, to enable staff to deliver the higher expectations embedded in the revised curriculum.

The pupils who spoke to us during the inspection were positive about the changes being made at the school. They appreciate the clearer guidance they now receive on how their work should be presented. Relationships between pupils and staff are productive. We noted that pupils behaved well during our visit. Pupils showed positive attitudes to learning and, for the most part, they were keen to get on with their work. Pupils enjoy the range of topics that they learn about in personal, social, health and economic education lessons.

You and your leaders are working effectively to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils' attendance is monitored closely. Your pastoral leaders are empowering form tutors to take greater responsibility for the attendance of pupils in their tutor groups. Overall attendance has improved. It is closer to the national average, but, as you

and your team recognise, there is still more to do. There are higher levels of absence in Year 11 compared to other year groups. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND has improved slightly. Nevertheless, attendance for these groups of pupils remains stubbornly below that of other pupils nationally. Although rates of persistent absence across the school are falling, they remain high.

The whole-school strategy to improve teaching encompasses the sixth form. A review of current assessment information for sixth form students shows that they continue to do well on vocational courses. However, students' progress on academic courses remains variable. Students are faring particularly well in psychology in Year 13. However, they are not achieving as well as they should in some other subjects, such as A-level history, geography and mathematics.

Governors are fully committed to ensuring that the school improves. They offer effective support and challenge to you and other leaders. Since the previous inspection, governors have sharpened their monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. As a result, they have a good understanding of the progress that is being made since the previous inspection. Governors are keen to develop their skills further. They have commissioned an external review of governance that is planned to take place next term.

Safeguarding was identified as a strength in the previous inspection. It continues to be so. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils and students are up to date. All staff receive relevant safeguarding training. Staff are vigilant and respond effectively to concerns about pupils. You maintain good communication with external agencies to ensure the safety of pupils. Referrals are made effectively and in a timely manner. You place a high priority on pupil's mental health and well-being. Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after. They know who to go to if they have a concern. Pupils are confident that staff will deal with issues effectively.

### **External support**

You are drawing on a range of external support to ensure that your planned actions are successful. For example, effective support from Cheshire Vale Teaching School Alliance is leading to stronger teaching and improving pupils' outcomes in the English department. It has also had a positive impact in developing a whole-school approach to promoting pupils' literacy skills. The history department is also benefiting from relevant and useful support from Hartford Church of England High School.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Continue to deliver the actions which are enshrined in the comprehensive school improvement plan.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Ahmed Marikar  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**