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Mr Phil Latham
Principal
Macmillan Academy
Stockton Road
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Dear Mr Latham

Short inspection of Macmillan Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Toni Spoors, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are rightly proud of the school's inclusive ethos and you are ambitious and determined that the school will provide the best possible education for all pupils. You have initiated plans and strategies for improvement so that all pupils have an equal chance to succeed, irrespective of their needs or circumstances. This is particularly the case with your efforts to improve outcomes for the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils. You, leaders and governors are determined that all pupils will leave the school with the skills and qualifications needed to be successful in whatever path they may choose.

You have a strong and cohesive senior leadership team who contribute well to the school's improvement. Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is insightful and a collegiate leadership approach has allowed you to draw out the best in your senior and middle leaders. Middle leaders are astute and they are confident and skilled to support and challenge staff. This ensures that teaching improves and pupils make even better progress; because of this, the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than last year. Staff feel an immense pride working at this school.

Your governors ably support and challenge you. They share your pride in the school and have a clear understanding of their strategic role in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result of their challenge, and their involvement in 'faculty reviews', teaching is improving within departments and across the school.

Pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school site. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive; they enjoy their lessons, are good-humoured and friendly. Pupils treat each other and adults with respect and courtesy. They are very proud of their school and appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities they have. These opportunities are extensive and varied, particularly in sport, music, drama and homework clubs.

Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching in English and mathematics has improved. As a result, pupils are making better progress in these subjects and differences between groups are diminishing rapidly. Current pupils make good progress from their starting points, across a range of subjects. This is because leaders have planned a curriculum that has increased expectations for pupils. Alongside an improved curriculum, you have developed a more rigorous assessment system, which is providing helpful 'steps' for pupils to reach their aspirational targets. Teachers are beginning to use the assessment information they have consistently to plan learning that meets the needs of all pupils. You and other leaders are aware that there is still some variability in the quality of teaching across some subjects and that the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils are not being fully challenged. However, you have put in place checks so that pupils who lag behind are supported earlier. You have ensured that the sixth form has maintained a good quality of education and that students are well prepared and supported to go on to further education, employment or training.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks take place before an adult works at the school. Leaders make referrals and the school works closely with parents and outside agencies to keep pupils safe. Staff and governors have received the most up-to-date training and are knowledgeable about issues relating to safeguarding pupils.

Pupils feel safe in the school. There is a comprehensive programme in place to allow pupils to learn about risks and keeping safe. These include issues around staying safe online, alcohol and drug abuse. Pupils told us that bullying is rare and that they know who to talk to if they have any concerns or worries. They also told us that they feel the school is 'caring' and that everyone is 'treated the same'. Parents also feel their children are safe.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, the achievement of the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 was below that of other pupils in the school and nationally. Leaders have taken action to remedy this. Through the development of a 'challenge framework', teachers are providing more challenge for the most able pupils which is leading to their improved progress. Leaders agree that

further work is needed to raise the expectations and achievement of this group of pupils.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving because teachers are becoming increasingly effective in planning activities that meets the needs of different groups of pupils.
- Senior leaders are working effectively with middle leaders to bring about improvements by sharing the most effective teaching practice more widely. In subjects such as English, modern foreign languages, science and drama, pupils benefit from teachers' questioning that gauges their understanding and tackles any misconceptions that pupils have. Pupils are able to articulate their answers clearly and confidently.
- Relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are strong. Teachers instil confidence in pupils and they make good progress as a result.
- Leaders have high expectations of teachers. They provide teachers with appropriate training to improve the quality of teaching across the school. The majority of teachers agree that this personalised programme, appropriate to different career stages, is helping them to improve. However, leaders acknowledge that there is still more to do to sharpen teachers' skills so that learning is challenging for all groups of pupils, particularly the most able and the most able disadvantaged.
- Inspectors looked closely at the quality of sixth-form provision, student outcomes, and how well prepared students are for their next steps. Leadership of the sixth form is good. Sixth-form leaders ensure that students access courses appropriate to their abilities and aspirations. Students engage in a wide range of enrichment activities, for example sporting events, drama and work placements. Their personal and social skills are exceptionally well developed. Students are prepared very well for their next steps and they all access further education, employment or training. Students make very good progress and achieve examinations results that are similar to national averages in academic subjects and above national averages in applied subjects. Pupils in lower year groups say sixth-form students are excellent 'role models' to them.
- Inspectors looked at the actions leaders are taking to improve attendance. Rates of absence and persistent absenteeism have fallen for all groups of pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have identified barriers that affect pupils' attendance and they use this information to take appropriate action to support those who need it. For example, actions such as first day contact, attendance officer referrals and increased involvement from parents are all having a positive impact to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Leaders acknowledge that further work is needed to ensure that disadvantaged pupils' attendance continues to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching improves further, by ensuring that teachers use pupil assessment information consistently to inform planning so that learning meets the needs of and challenges all groups of pupils, in particular the most able and the most able disadvantaged
- work to improve attendance continues, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you and members of your senior and middle leadership teams. Meetings also took place with the chair and two other members of the governing body, groups of pupils from Years 7 and 8 and Years 9 and 10. Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation document, development plan and records concerning attendance, exclusions and destinations. They scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and the school's own assessment of the progress it is making. Inspectors, with members of the senior leadership team, observed learning in a range of year groups. Inspectors reviewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. Inspectors took account of the 25 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the 107 staff questionnaire responses and the 62 pupil questionnaire responses.