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Mr Richard O'Regan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Regan

Short inspection of Alder Community High School

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with David Roberts, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong leadership and determination, alongside the passion and skill of your deputy headteacher, have ensured that there have been many significant improvements in quality and standards in the last three years. You, your senior leadership team and governors have created a culture in which staff and pupils feel confident and valued. Discussions with inspectors and responses to Ofsted's questionnaires show very clearly that staff, pupils, governors and parents are very loyal to you and proud of the school.

You have developed very strong capacity in middle and senior leadership. Governors have released senior leaders for significant periods of time to support other schools within the A+ Trust. This has given them opportunities to develop high-level leadership skills in other contexts, without hindering the development of your school. Middle leaders have benefited from opportunities to step in as senior leaders.

Governors of the school have high aspirations for pupils and give their time freely. They are infectious about pupils' successes and have a very detailed knowledge of what the school needs to do to reach their goal of providing an outstanding quality of education. They bring a very wide range of educational, financial and business skills and consequently are robust and forthright in questioning leaders.

The care and compassion which leaders and governors bring to their roles permeate all aspects of school life. In particular, staff are persistent in ensuring that vulnerable pupils, including those whom other schools send for a trial period, successfully remain as full-time pupils at Alder Community High. Staff do not give up. They leave no stone unturned in meeting the needs of pupils in difficulty. A typical comment from a parent was, 'At Alder every pupil matters.'

With considerable success, you systematically addressed the areas for improvement which inspectors identified at the time of the last inspection. They asked you to:

- set high expectations for the presentation and organisation of students' work
- move the most able students to high-level tasks and activities, as soon as they are ready, to prepare them better to attain the highest GCSE grades
- measure the progress of all students to ascertain when they are ready to move on
- make sure that the measures that leaders use to judge the impact of actions identified in development plans are closely linked to improvements in students' learning and progress.

Staff at all levels meet your expectation that they will be 'consistent, persistent and insistent'. As a consequence, pupils now take a great deal of pride in how their work is presented and the level of accuracy they achieve. As pupils organise tasks and notes well in exercise books and folders, they are able to use them efficiently when revising for examinations.

Leaders have devised a new assessment system which accurately and regularly identifies gaps in learning. Teachers use this well to plan for pupils' progress. However, as you have already identified, teachers do not always provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Although the achievement of most-able pupils in your school is above national averages, this group does not make as much progress as those pupils in your school who come to you with average or below-average results at the end of Year 6. We agreed that, despite your 'pitching-up' strategy, some teaching still fails to meet the needs of higher-ability pupils.

Plans for improvement now list detailed and specific intended outcomes in terms of pupils' learning and progress. Leaders and governors use the identified criteria for success to check if policies and actions have had the desired impact. You are in the process of developing a consistent format for all plans so that those not involved in their development understand them more easily.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders and governors have ensured that staff fully understand that safeguarding the pupils in your care is a priority and the responsibility of everyone in the school. As a result, you have created a very vigilant community. Responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents indicate that they have confidence that your systems and processes will keep their sons and daughters safe from physical and emotional harm.

Staff have carried out all the checks necessary to make sure that adults are suitable to work with children and young people. All those who work in the school have undertaken significant training so that they are aware of the latest guidance and know how to tell if a pupil is in danger. Risk assessments of educational visits are thorough and meet all requirements.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media, and strong firewalls ensure that no one can access inappropriate websites while in the school. A paper copy of the safety-online policy is available and leaders are currently uploading it to the website. Pupils benefit from visits from a good range of agencies to help them develop an understanding of issues such as extremism and grooming. The school does not use alternative off-site provision for any pupils.

Inspection findings

- Over time and compared with national figures, the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11, in most subjects, is at least good and exceptionally good in mathematics. When taking into account pupils' capabilities and the results they achieved at the end of primary school, the progress of pupils across their GCSE subjects is above average.
- Disadvantaged pupils in the school make less progress than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. I wanted to establish whether you use the pupil premium funding effectively to improve the progress of this group. The improvement plan for disadvantaged pupils outlines well the barriers to learning that they face and identifies actions to address them. Your support for these pupils begins when they are still in primary school. Using funding to employ an extra progress leader has enabled you to provide activities such as a summer school at the end of Year 6. This develops confidence and learning skills as well as literacy and numeracy. You have also invested in extra external careers information, education, advice and guidance which has enabled disadvantaged pupils to broaden their horizons when choosing opportunities beyond Year 11. These, and many other initiatives, have resulted in some diminishing of differences in progress. However, you recognise that you need to do more to ensure that disadvantaged pupils catch up rapidly with their peers.
- Most pupils rarely miss a day of school because staff work very hard, using a wide range of strategies, to encourage good attendance. However, for some time the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been well below that of their peers. I wanted to know whether you had made any improvements in this area. Your own analysis shows that this group still does not attend school regularly enough and that this has had a negative impact on the educational standards they achieve. Using the pupil premium funding, you appointed a family-support worker who recently took up post. Her targeted work with pupils and families has begun to have a positive impact so that there has been some improvement since September. Despite this, you agreed that you need to do further work with these pupils and their families so that they attend school regularly and achieve their full potential.

- You have used funding for pupils who need to catch up in English and mathematics in Year 7 very effectively. As a result of intervention in class, as well as using small-group work, almost all have caught up with their peers by the end of Year 7.
- Pupils in the school follow a broad and balanced curriculum with a very wide range of GCSE options available. I was interested to know why so few study the range of GCSE subjects which make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). You explained that leaders and governors hold sincere convictions about what is best for individual pupils in this school rather than what will increase EBacc percentages and overall progress scores. You gave me evidence to show that your curriculum policy does not represent low expectations. In particular, you showed me examples of very able past pupils who did not achieve EBacc but who went on to study at very prestigious universities. However, we agreed that for some pupils the reason for not entering EBacc was weaknesses in the teaching of modern foreign languages and geography. You have now transformed modern foreign languages so that more and more pupils are opting to study a language in key stage 4 and are making good progress. The number of pupils who take the GCSEs necessary for EBacc is now rising each year and is much closer to the national figure. We agreed that achievement and the quality of teaching in geography remain a significant weakness in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils attend school more regularly and make more rapid progress so that they catch up with their peers and reach their full potential
- teaching in geography is of better quality so that uptake at key stage 4 and GCSE results improve and contribute more positively to EBacc entries and the school's overall progress score.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Kelly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I had discussions with you, your leadership team and members of the governing body. Jointly with you and members of your senior leadership team, I and my inspector colleague visited classrooms. We spoke to a range of pupils in lessons, in discussion groups and at social times. My colleague

listened to pupils read and scrutinised reading records. With two subject leaders we looked at pupils' work. We analysed the website and a range of documents, including the single central record, records of child protection and staff training, the school's self-evaluation and the improvement plan. We also scrutinised anonymised case studies of pupils currently in the school. We discussed with senior leaders aspects of safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and the use of funding. We spoke to a cross section of teachers, including middle leaders. We considered 85 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free-text comments from parents. We also considered 51 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire and 73 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.