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Mr Alan Doust
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Doust

Short inspection of The Community College, Bishop's Castle

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 2018 with Elizabeth Ellis-Martin, 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your deputy provide strong and effective leadership and have built a committed staff team. You are all determined to create a positive learning culture. The chair and vice-chair of governors say that you and your staff ensure that the school is at the heart of the local community.

Governors wholeheartedly support your leadership of this small, rural secondary school, which is growing in popularity with parents. Due to your leadership and innovative curriculum offer, pupils choose to attend this school, not just from local villages but also from Wales. In some year groups, almost one third of pupils travel from Powys to attend your school. This is because of its good reputation for achievement and inclusion.

Staff told us that you care passionately about the well-being of pupils, who are polite, considerate and cooperative. They are also articulate, keen and able to apply themselves to learning for sustained periods of time. As a result, they deepen their knowledge and understanding. Pupils display positive attitudes to school because of the positive working relationships provided by your staff.

Parents appreciate the care and support you and your staff give to their children. One parent said, 'I am very pleased with the choice of school for my child.' Another simply wrote, 'Great school'. Pupils are equally appreciative of the pastoral support offered to them when they need it and say they feel safe. They are confident to

approach staff and confirmed that the school promotes respect for all.

All of your colleagues who completed the staff survey said the school was well led and managed.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that pupils made accelerated progress. You have done this by ensuring that teachers ask challenging questions, push pupils to think and work hard, and share best practice. Governors understand that improvements have been made because of your leadership. Nonetheless, you and your governors recognise that two areas need continued attention. First, although teaching is now more effective, some inconsistencies remain. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress they are capable of.

Second, you make appropriate use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and offer a wide range of opportunities to help pupils catch up. However, there is no evidence that leaders have evaluated the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes. As a result, you are not able to show which initiatives are effective and which are not.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding exists. Staff, pupils and parents agree that school is a safe place. Pupils told us that your staff deal promptly with rare occurrences of bullying. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The local authority provides an annual audit of the school's safeguarding practice and you act swiftly to address any issues identified within the report.

School staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and the school's safeguarding team provides staff with regular updates. School staff know how to raise and report any concerns they might have. You and your senior staff understand, and follow carefully, procedures for recruiting staff to the school. You keep accurate records and ensure that information is shared when needed.

Inspection findings

- We looked at improvements made within the quality of teaching. You have correctly identified that boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils were underperforming. As a result, you set clear actions to improve these pupils' performance and highlight these in the school's strategic development plan. You have provided staff with training to help develop their teaching skills. You have shared with staff your understanding of what good teaching looks like. Staff now regularly observe good practice within school and in other schools. Consequently, teaching is now more effective and leaders are better equipped to monitor improvements. Furthermore, you have been able to provide informed reports to governors that show boys and disadvantaged pupils are doing better than they used to. We saw how you used milestones in your planning to measure pupils'

progress and agree with you that most pupils now make good progress.

- Second, we looked at how pupils secured improvements in their classwork. Three heads of faculty, who lead the school's subject areas, have introduced explicit strategies to improve pupils' performance and to ensure that teachers share good practice. For example, faculty leaders now analyse and review assessment data in order to identify interventions required. As a result, teachers prepare lessons which meet specific needs of pupils based on this accurate data analysis. Subject leaders monitor the implementation of these interventions to check the rate of pupils' progress. Faculty leaders have high expectations in securing improvements. For example, they have introduced single schemes of work from Years 7 to 11 in each subject area. As a result, teachers now routinely plan for progression and encourage pupils to review and revise pieces of work. Consequently, pupils now know how to draw on prior learning to deepen their understanding. Additionally, pupils were able to show us why and how they have made improvements to their previous work.
- Third, we looked at how teaching challenges pupils. You have introduced new approaches to teaching the most able pupils and for setting high expectations. This is set out clearly in your school development plan. The school has provided staff training about the effective use of questioning to extend pupils' knowledge. Carefully considered questions now form part of teachers' lessons. As a result, pupils willingly critique information and are actively involved in learning. In one faculty, teachers have worked together to construct lessons where pupils can work independently and develop their study skills. As a result, pupils can work productively, either alone or in groups, for sustained periods of time. We also observed teaching that challenged pupils to think deeply. In one lesson, for example, the teacher insisted that pupils edited work to refine and improve the vocabulary.
- You have established support for teachers to use digital technologies in lessons and to be creative. These new opportunities motivate and develop pupils' skills. We saw work where pupils regularly annotated complex pieces of text written by the teacher. Consequently, pupils handle challenge well because their behaviour for learning is mature and their relationships with teachers are strong. In turn, this enables pupils to learn from the teacher and from one another. Sometimes, however, lesson planning does not reflect your high expectations. Consequently, a few teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of are not high enough. In such cases, the level of challenge is too low and teachers do not rectify misconceptions swiftly enough. You are aware of these problems and have plans in place to address them.
- Finally, we looked at the effective use of additional funding to help disadvantaged pupils catch up with others. Your self-evaluation document accurately identified that disadvantaged pupils underachieved in the past. We agree that your school development plan lists actions intended to meet the needs of these pupils. You offer a range of extensive opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to catch up. This includes subsidies in order to take part in school trips and visits to universities, as well as attending an on-site 'homework hub', which enables pupils to access digital technology after school. However, you have not developed any evaluation of the impact of these initiatives on pupils' outcomes. Consequently,

neither you nor your governors know which activities have or have not had a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching continues to strengthen so that all pupils make rapid progress
- the impact of additional spending and of improvement strategies is carefully evaluated so that leaders know which actions are effective and which are not.

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

Yours sincerely

Antony Edkins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your deputy and other leaders. We visited several classes, with you or with other senior leaders, where we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. I met with the chair and vice-chair of governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority's school improvement team. We scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, safeguarding information and your school development plan. We considered 94 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 58 free-text responses. We considered 35 responses from staff and 52 responses from pupils to their respective online inspection questionnaires.