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Mr Andrew Shaw
Executive Principal
Westwood College
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Dear Mr Shaw

Short inspection of Westwood College

Following my visit to the school with Her Majesty's Inspector, Simon Mosley, on 13 October 2015, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Although only very recently appointed, you have used your experience as a national leader of education to quickly, and accurately, identify the strengths of the school and the key actions required to improve standards. Other leaders also new to their roles include your Chair of the Governing Body and the subject leader for English. You and your associate headteacher are ambitious for the school and have high expectations for students, a vision which staff support entirely.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Weaknesses identified in that report have been addressed and action has recently been taken to improve leadership and teaching in English in response to the slower progress made by Year 11 students in 2015.

Better teaching, which has had an impact on rising standards at Key Stages 4 and 5, was seen in virtually all subjects by the end of the last academic year. After a turbulent year in English, with temporary teachers and leaders and an associated dip in standards, the department is now back on track. Students still have some catching up to do before the impact of this better teaching is seen through your assessment information. You are confident in the new subject leader's ability to drive improvements in English, due to her considerable success in leading improvements to teaching across the school.

Leaders have taken decisive action to address the few weaknesses in teaching, including implementing a combination of training and support plans to help teachers

to improve their practice. Inspectors agreed with leaders' views on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment seen during observations of teaching carried out jointly with school leaders. Questioning, a weakness seen in the last inspection, has improved through training for teachers in how to make their questions more challenging. Students are now routinely asked to explain their answers in greater depth. Students appreciate the good marking of their work, identified as a strength in the last inspection, which helps them to see where they have gone wrong. Literacy development in all subjects has improved and students routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors. Further work is now needed to make sure weak readers are identified quickly and given the support they need to help them to catch up.

Conduct around school and the extensive school grounds is excellent. Inspectors saw students who were playing safely in hiding and chasing games in the wooded areas. Students made use of the hard courts for safe ball games and sat calmly in rockery and open field areas, and the canteen, as they talked sociably with their friends. They treat each other, and their surroundings, with respect and they say there is very little poor behaviour.

High expectations about regular attendance and the appointment of an educational welfare officer have been instrumental in improving students' attendance rates and providing support for families who need it. Further refinement of monitoring processes, linking with students' achievements, would be helpful for school leaders to identify groups of students, such as disabled students and those with special educational needs, who may need help in catching up with work following absence.

Improvements continue to personal, social and health education and opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Students now learn about fundamental British values, politics and democracy, crime and punishment, and tolerance and respect in addition to careers information, enterprise and religion.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders give a high priority to keeping students safe. They have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, records are suitably detailed and that staff know what they need to do when there are any concerns.

Students say they feel safe in all areas of the school. They 'look after each other' and know what to do if they were to see a stranger on the school grounds. The possibility of mistaking sixth form students for a potential intruder on the school grounds was shared with school leaders who immediately started to consider plans to resolve this issue using identity badges on coloured lanyards.

Inspection findings

- Leaders know the school well and have a clear understanding of the reasons why the school is not yet outstanding.

- Students have high aspirations because challenging targets are set in all subjects. An enhanced culture is being developed where all students are expected to make progress which is better than the minimum expected based upon their ability.
- Teachers' performance, or appraisal, is rigorously managed. Teachers' targets are challenging, as they are based on the high expectations of progress made by their students. Governors make sure effective teaching is rewarded.
- Quality, rather than quantity, has been the aim in improving the range of subjects studied by students who now concentrate on eight or nine GCSE subjects rather than the previous 11 subjects. Work-related, or vocational, subjects are few in number but are available for students who could benefit from these courses. Most students follow academic courses which are more appropriate to their ability.
- When asked where the best teaching was to be seen in the school, students gave a long list of subjects where teachers work hard to make sure students achieve their best, including in English, mathematics, science and humanities. They struggled to identify subjects where teaching was less strong.
- The 16–19 study programme for sixth form students is effective because standards in the sixth form are rising, particularly at AS level, where students now make better progress than in the past. Time provided to study English and mathematics has increased and in future students will not have to give up their lunchtime to attend resit classes. Sixth form teaching very effectively encourages students to develop the skills they need to help them to be successful learners and to succeed in higher education, training or employment.
- Good practice in teaching is shared with other schools in the Leek Federation. The school collaborates well with Leek High School to provide a bespoke collection of courses including vocational subjects and enrichment activities for sixth form students across the Federation.
- A new role for one of your leaders, with oversight of student support and progress, includes monitoring of attendance. Although much is known about the attendance of disadvantaged students, less is known about other groups of students or any patterns in their absence.
- Disadvantaged students' attendance is checked, together with targeted support for individuals and families, which is providing leaders with the information they need to help these students to attend school more regularly. This continues to present a challenge for the small number of disabled students and those with special educational needs, some of whom have medical conditions which impact on their regular attendance at school.
- Leaders have worked hard to make sure teachers correct literacy errors when they mark work, but there is still further work to do to make sure that all students read widely and often. Reading age checks would enable leaders to check on the accuracy of teacher assessments from the

previous school and will help to identify those who need further support with their reading, through a phonics (letters and the sounds they make) programme.

- You have introduced a new approach to writing plans for action. The strategic development plan is a useful document to drive improvements in the school because people who are leading each action are clearly identified. It is not clear who is responsible for checking on the quality of the finished action to make sure the desired outcome has been achieved. Milestones, or intermediate targets, reviewed each term would help governors to check for themselves if the actions are actually making any difference.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- a more concerted drive to improving reading across the school is introduced by quickly identifying weak readers and providing them with a programme to help them to read better
- checks on attendance are carried out for all groups of students so that any patterns of low attendance are quickly identified and urgent action can be taken so that attendance continues to improve for all students
- further refinements are made to the quality of action plans so that they become a more strategic document for governors, and other leaders, to use to check on the school's progress to becoming outstanding.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. An inspector met formally with a group of teaching and support staff to gather the views of staff, and a group of students to find out how they were being supported with developing their literacy skills. Students gave inspectors their views on the school when they spoke to us in the canteen and around the school grounds at breaktime and lunchtime. We joined you and your associate headteacher in short visits to lessons, where we spoke to students and looked at their work. The views of parents were considered through the 24 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated recent information on students' progress and scrutinised other records about keeping students safe, their attendance and punctuality and their behaviour.