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Mr Giuseppe Di'Tasio
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Dear Mr Di'Tasio

Short inspection of Wales High School

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Tudor Griffiths and Gordon Watts, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with governors, you are resolutely committed to the school's further improvement. You are not complacent about any of the school's successes and strengths. Equally, you have a very accurate and honest understanding of where you need to do more work to further improve the school. Crucially, you have already started to take the necessary steps to address these areas.

Following the last inspection, you took decisive action to improve the consistency in middle leadership. A significant number of middle leaders are now nationally recognised as leaders in their subject areas, and they provide support to other schools. Recent changes to how you monitor pupils' progress have enabled middle leaders to take more responsibility for the quality of teaching in their subject areas. As a result, while there is still work to do, there is growing consistency in the quality of teaching, so that pupils' achievement is now in line with national averages over time.

You also addressed weaknesses in the quality of school improvement plans. Your thorough and honest self-evaluation accurately identifies the areas in school which require continued focus. This clarity of understanding has enabled you to implement an improvement plan which provides leaders and governors with the means to monitor and evaluate progress against each of the identified actions. As a

consequence, governors are able to hold you to account for how well pupils are doing.

You have rightly identified the progress of disadvantaged pupils and of boys as the main areas of focus. However, you have already taken steps to address these priorities. You have appointed additional staff, for instance, to lead the development of boys' progress, and you have detailed plans for how best to use the pupil premium funding. You know that there is more work to be done, including improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, but these actions are leading to improving outcomes for these groups of pupils.

You also acknowledge that standards dipped in English for pupils who left Year 11 in 2017. You acted quickly to gain a full understanding of why and how this happened, and you put a number of actions into place to bring standards up again. As a result, there are clear signs of strong improvement in English.

In the sixth form, you have taken action to further improve outcomes in 2018. Although achievement in 2017 was in line with national averages, you acknowledge that this was not as strong as in the previous two years. You have a clear understanding of why this is the case. You have taken action, and there is evidence of very effective teaching in the sixth form as a result.

You and other leaders have worked with persistence and diligence to maintain and improve levels of attendance and persistent absence, which are better than the national averages. Similarly, over several years you have maintained a rate of fixed-term exclusion, which is below the national average. Pupils told us that behaviour around school and in lessons is good most of the time and, indeed, inspectors saw high standards of pupil conduct throughout the inspection. You acknowledge that the school faces some challenging behaviour from a few pupils – a view shared by a small proportion of parents, carers and staff – and that this remains a priority for you.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The procedures around the recruitment and vetting of staff are appropriate. Leaders have made sure that all adults in the school are up to date with the necessary safeguarding training.

Those responsible for child protection arrangements, including the plans for children looked after by the local authority, ensure that records are thorough, with all actions taken in a timely manner and accurately logged. There are strong links with external agencies, including the local authority children's services and health services.

Leaders maintain appropriate communication with the relevant staff at the alternative education provision used by the school, including daily attendance checks and fortnightly progress reviews.

You have acted decisively in responding to the needs of your pupils, such as training 18 staff as mental health first aiders. You have also enabled the development of the 'Be-U-Tiful LGBTQ support and awareness group'. As a consequence of this and other work, pupils told us that the school is a tolerant place, and that they feel safe there. They told us that bullying is rare, but that if it happens, the school deals with it.

Inspection findings

- Following a searching examination of standards in English after the dip in 2017, expectations of pupils are high and there is some very effective teaching. In Year 11, for example, pupils' understanding of the skills required to gain high marks in the unseen poetry examination were systematically and thoroughly developed. As a result, pupils have clarity about what they need to do to achieve top marks.
- A similar quality of teaching and high expectations was evident in Year 7 mathematics. Pupils' understanding of ratios was skilfully established by the effective use of questions. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, were challenged to explain their reasoning to the rest of the class. This enabled pupils to grasp the mathematical principles sitting behind the tasks set by the teachers.
- While there is strong evidence of high aspirations and pupils knowing what they need to do to improve, there is some inconsistency. This is within and between subjects in the extent to which teachers articulate next steps to pupils, such as Year 9 English and Year 9 science. Additionally, on occasions, such as in Year 8 mathematics and key stage 4 history, expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not as high as they could be. Leaders recognise this variability.
- Outcomes for boys are improving and the gap with girls is closing, although leaders are not complacent about the job still to be done here. There is some effective work taking place to improve boys' literacy in Year 7, so that they can better access the curriculum as they move through the school. The parent and sons reading group which takes place after school is encouraging boys to read. As one of them said: 'I decided to put my phone down and read a book instead.'
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving, as seen in a range of subjects and years, including English, mathematics, science, religious education, history and geography, as well as in pupils' work and in the school's own progress information. This is due to the clarity of leaders' plans for the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, and in the rigour of the implementation of the plans. You acknowledge that the progress of disadvantaged pupils will continue to be a priority.
- Although attendance rates in recent years have been comparable with national averages, as have been persistent absence rates, you have taken effective action to maintain and improve on this positive picture. You have focused especially on disadvantaged pupils because their attendance as a group is not as good as other pupils in the school. As a result of your actions, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving. You recognise that although there are often complex circumstances around the attendance of some pupils who have special

educational needs and/or disabilities, there is more work to be done to bring their attendance in line with the rest of the school.

- In the sixth form, there is some very effective teaching in a range of subjects. In a Year 12 religious education lesson, for example, the teacher's skilful use of questions deepened and stretched students' knowledge and understanding about the word of God. High expectations of what students can achieve were evident in a Year 12 physics lesson about momentum, a Year 12 geology lesson about trilobites and a Year 13 English lesson on 'The Handmaid's Tale'. Students told inspectors, though, that sometimes the work can be less challenging than they would like.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress is further improved by the consistent communication of next steps and of consistently high expectations
- students' progress in the sixth form is further improved by consistently high expectations
- the focus on the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and the progress of boys, continues to be a priority.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with members of the governing body. An inspector met with a group of subject leaders. Members of the inspection team met with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5 and also spoke informally with them around the school. Inspectors met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, the sixth form, teaching and learning, pupil premium funding, and attendance and behaviour. We conducted joint visits to lessons with you, the leader of the sixth form and the senior leader responsible for teaching and learning. During these visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about what they were learning and their progress. Inspectors also visited lessons without senior leaders. Inspectors looked in detail at pupils' books and folders, both with and without senior leaders present. An inspector listened to pupils reading. I took into account results from Ofsted's online questionnaires: Parent View (211 responses), including the 209 free-text responses;

the staff survey (74 responses); and the pupil survey (149 responses). We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, safeguarding records, behaviour and attendance records, including bullying logs, pupil assessment and progress information, and other documents available on the school website.