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12 January 2018

Mr Mark Lovatt
Principal
Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy
Birtley Lane
Birtley
Chester le Street
County Durham
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Dear Mr Lovatt

No formal designation inspection of Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

Following my visit with Steven Shaw, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements, behaviour and welfare of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, related to these safeguarding features of the school's work were also inspected.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They also met with the principal and other senior and middle leaders, including the leader of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. They met formally with groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. The lead inspector also met with governors, including the chair of the governing body.

Inspectors also scrutinised governors' reports and minutes, attendance records and behaviour logs. They spoke with staff at the school, including those newly or

recently qualified and with the drivers of the school buses about pupils' behaviour, well-being and attitudes to school.

Inspectors also spoke informally with groups of pupils, including those in the school's sixth form, and observed pupils at the start and end of the day, between lessons and at break and lunchtimes. They visited a range of tutor sessions.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Context

Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy is significantly larger than the average secondary school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is average. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is slightly below average.

Inspection findings

- There is a culture of safeguarding at the school. This is underpinned by careful and detailed systems and checks. This aspect of the school's work is well led by the deputy principal. Staff and governors show a clear understanding of their responsibilities and of the processes to keep pupils safe. Staff are clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Staff are well trained and are encouraged to improve their skills by leaders. For example, supported by the deputy principal, a group of over 20 staff has recently begun training to improve their understanding of young people's mental well-being. As a result of this and other opportunities, staff are well-placed to promptly identify and appropriately support potentially vulnerable pupils. They are also rigorous in their engagement with outside agencies. Staff ensure that pupils get the support they need. Procedures for the recruitment of staff and for checking the suitability of visitors are very secure. Leaders check staff's suitability to work with children appropriately.
- Pupils have many opportunities to learn how to stay safe through the subjects taught in the curriculum, in tutor time and other opportunities such as assemblies, regular well-being days and visiting speakers. Through this range of opportunities leaders ensure that pupils explore a range of topics in ways appropriate for their age. The topics covered include road safety, bullying in its range of forms and how to combat it. Pupils told inspectors that they know how to stay safe online. Pupils say that they have staff they can go to if they were worried or unhappy. They are confident that adults would listen if they had any concerns and take prompt and appropriate action.

- Approximately 25% of the school population is considered to be disadvantaged. Historically, these pupils have not made as much progress as their peers. Also, the attendance of this group of pupils has been lower than that of others. Leaders at the school are very aware of this and have put in place a wide range of initiatives to address the weaker performance of this group of pupils. Because of the effective and diligent actions of the school, the attendance of this group of pupils is now improving. The attendance of those in this group who are persistently absent, that is those pupils whose attendance is less than 90%, has improved even more strongly. This is because the efforts of the senior leader responsible for this aspect of the school's work are effective, carefully targeted and humane.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, although slowly improving, is still not as it should be. Despite the introduction of a range of initiatives, such as the introduction of the disadvantaged pupil passport which focuses on an individual pupil's barriers to learning, these pupils are still not performing as they should.
- The leadership of the support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is effective. The leader focuses support effectively and monitors its effect carefully. This group of pupils is well cared for. Historically, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make as much, and often more, progress than their peers. There are strong and tenacious links with outside agencies. Gateshead local authority provides effective support for this aspect of the school's work.
- Leaders have put in place a range of initiatives to address the weaknesses in pupils' behaviour and attendance. Overall, pupils are well behaved. They move around the school calmly and with consideration for others. There is very little litter on the site. The relatively recently introduced school-wide approach to behaviour is having a positive effect. Pupils report that behaviour is better. However, they also say that there is some inconsistency in its application by staff. They report that there is some low-level disruption in lessons, especially in some lower sets. They also say that when low-level disruption does take place it is generally dealt with promptly and well by staff. Although overall behaviour has improved, leaders have not done enough to address the issues that contribute to the disproportionate number of disadvantaged pupils who misbehave or who are absent from school. Despite significant improvements, particularly in the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent, the success of these pupils is still being held back by poor behaviour and/or attendance.
- The school works increasingly effectively with pupils who, from time to time, find the school's expectations challenging. Staff know pupils well and take care to ensure that they identify and seek to remove barriers to learning and encourage positive attitudes to school. The number of permanent exclusions is very significantly lower this year than for the same period last year. Fixed-term exclusions and the use of after-school detention have also reduced. The very recent introduction of an inclusion room on site has contributed to the school's ability to focus positively on pupils' behaviour and attitudes. However, even in the short time the facility has been open, the records of use, carefully kept and

analysed by the teacher in charge, show that the room is disproportionately attended by disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders are not using this and similar information to inform their approaches to further improving behaviour and attitudes to learning.

- Governors have a good understanding of the school's safeguarding systems and they are very clear about their responsibilities to keep all at the school safe. They also have a very clear understanding of safeguarding in its broadest sense and the school's responsibility to ensure that all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, make progress and succeed.
- Governors are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They do not rely solely on the information they receive from the principal to make their judgements about how well it is doing. For example, although still developing, they have increasingly fruitful links with middle leaders. These leaders are helping governors to understand the effect of the school's initiatives in a range of areas. They are also giving governors keener insights into what is working and leading to improvement at the school, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, and what is not. As a result, governors are increasingly more able to hold the principal to account for the pace and effect of the school's improvement.

External support

The school has received some effective support from Macmillan Academy, Middlesbrough in planning its actions to improve disadvantaged pupils' well-being. Macmillan Academy humanities staff have also supported humanities teaching at Lord Lawson. Cardinal Hume Catholic School has also helped Lord Lawson review its pupil premium provision.

The school receives effective support from Gateshead local authority in its work for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders and governors should ensure that the range of initiatives that have been put in place to address the weaknesses in behaviour, attendance and the well-being of, particularly, disadvantaged pupils at the school are consistently applied and their effect carefully and meticulously measured so that improvement is more rapid and sustained.
- Governors should continue to develop their skills so that they can better hold the principal to account for the more rapid improvement of the school.
- Leaders should continue to ensure that the attendance of all pupils continues to improve. While there are clear signs that attendance is improving, it is still not good enough. More needs to be done to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

- Further develop the whole-school approach to behaviour so that it is based on high expectations for all and it is consistently applied. Also, ensure that it effectively supports pupils as they seek to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Ensure that disadvantaged pupils make more accelerated progress by leaders carefully sharing the barriers to their learning with all staff so that teachers can better focus their teaching on what these pupils need to consistently improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector