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Mr Alasdair Ashcroft
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Dear Mr Ashcroft

Short inspection of Garstang Community Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018 with Debra Wood, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been a number of significant leadership changes. You have become principal and other leaders also have new roles. The previous principal is now the executive principal. At the same time, the school has become part of the Fylde Coast Academies Trust (FCAT), and a new academy council has been appointed in place of the previous governing body.

Those involved in these changes are successfully using them to build on the school's established achievements. The vision and goal of the school to achieve 'excellence for everyone' remain the same. However, there are now easier opportunities to work with other schools to achieve them. These opportunities are starting to be used. Pupils understand the school's high aspirations and know that they are expected to try hard and behave well. Staff know pupils well and the school provides a caring environment where pupils succeed and are well looked after.

Senior leaders have a clear view of the school's performance; you know its strengths and are honest about the things which still need to be improved. Where needed, leaders are prepared to take clear action to help things improve. For example, the results achieved by Year 11 pupils in English in 2017 were disappointing. However, leaders rapidly considered why this was so and took steps to improve the situation. This work is already showing signs of success. The school's self-evaluation document is comprehensive and is closely linked to the improvement plan.

Inspectors saw pupils learning well as a result of effective teaching. The school's own records confirm that teaching helps pupils to make progress. However, you know that to increase rates of progress to be even faster, practice across the school needs to become even more effective. Leaders successfully use opportunities to share the best practice found in the school and are well placed to seek out and learn from highly effective approaches elsewhere.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve teaching, for example, by providing greater opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills in all subjects. You provided training for all staff, and schemes of work across the school now set out how different subjects will contribute to this wider skill development. In addition, the school has increased its focus on reading. Pupils are expected to read each week and those in key stage 3 are expected to read to an adult as part of their activities in English.

Teachers were also asked to provide work to challenge individuals equally, and particularly the less able. This is now more closely checked when leaders evaluate how effective teaching is. Leaders have made changes to raise pupils' expectations and understanding of what they need to achieve, for example, by including more wide-ranging questions in the regular assessment of pupils' progress. You have also considered the needs of different groups as you have developed the school's curriculum to ensure that this is suitably challenging. The overall progress that groups of pupils with different starting points make in different subjects is similar. However, this progress remains broadly average.

The school was also asked to improve middle leadership. This has been accomplished securely, for example, as a result of training and of better systems to ensure that middle leaders are held to account, and that they hold others to account. For example, middle leaders have a much more significant role in observing the work of their colleagues and checking pupils' work. Middle leaders are confident that they now make a real difference to pupils' success.

The parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, were generally satisfied about the school. A number noted the care provided by the school to pupils who have particular long- or short-term needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are effective. There is detailed information for parents and others on the school website. This includes ways to report any concerns quickly and confidentially. Members of the new academy council have already undertaken safeguarding training.

Safeguarding arrangements have been improved since the previous inspection. Leaders have ensured that, as well as responding to any safeguarding incidents, learning is also drawn from them. The physical security of the site has been increased with the installation of fencing. This adds to pupils' feeling of safety. A

group of pupils told inspectors of recent further improvements with the installation of locking front gates to the school. Pupils also discussed how they are taught about how to be safe when they are online.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have high aspirations. Leadership and governance are improving as a result of the recent changes, including the school's transfer into FCAT. The new academy council is already providing strong strategic challenge to school leaders. Its members form a well-balanced team. They confidently and thoroughly hold leaders to account. The academy council includes previous governors, which provides continuity, as does the continuing role of the previous headteacher as executive headteacher. Leaders and teachers have started to use links within FCAT to consider how to make the school's practice even better, although this is at a relatively early stage. Within the school, leaders work well together and roles are clear. Leaders are strengthening leadership further. For example, the training they organise is carefully focused on key priorities. In addition, opportunities for individual leaders to develop are provided through formal, nationally accredited leadership programmes and by secondment in the school.
- Pupils learn and make progress across the various different subjects they study. Results in English for Year 11 pupils dipped in 2017. However, leaders' response to this demonstrates that they are not satisfied unless pupils do as well as they should. Results in modern languages improved markedly in the most recent GCSEs. This followed an intensive programme of support and training for staff. Leaders and teachers ensure that their own assessment of pupils is accurate by checking this against teachers' work in other schools. Current school data indicates that pupils are making faster progress than in the previous school year. Pupils with different starting points make progress at similar rates. However, leaders recognise the importance of the most able achieving the highest possible grades. Ensuring that this happens is a particular task for a member of the senior leadership team.
- Teaching and learning in the school are effective. The school's own records indicate that teaching has improved over time. Teaching and learning have been clear improvement priorities for the school. The training, support and challenge offered by leaders to teachers have been successful. During this inspection, inspectors saw teaching which helped pupils to make progress. However, on a few occasions, the activities offered did not provide enough challenge to the range of pupils in the class.
- Middle leaders play an important part in the success of the school. They are closely involved in ensuring that teaching and learning in their areas are as good as possible. They confirmed that this role has increased since the previous inspection. They are confident to share their ideas, skills and effective practice and are starting to do this with other schools in FCAT. Leaders know that this could be extended further by gaining ideas about highly effective practice from other schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders and teachers build on and extend the school's effective practice by:
 - making the most use of the opportunities provided by the school being a member of a multi-academy trust
 - seeking opportunities to find out about outstanding practice in other schools to help them determine how to increase this at Garstang Community Academy.
- teachers' work with pupils of different starting points provides the additional challenge needed to further increase the rates of pupils' progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy council and the chief executive officer of the Fylde Coast Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. Inspectors had discussions with a group of members of the academy council, including its chair, and with representatives of the Fylde Coast Academies Trust. An inspector met with a group of pupils, and inspectors talked with others around the school during lessons and breaks. An inspector also met with a group of subject leaders. An inspector toured the school with you. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in classes across the school; some of this was as a joint activity with a seconded senior leader. An inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' books jointly with two senior leaders. Inspectors examined documents including information about the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation document, the improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the academy council and information about pupils' achievement. Inspectors considered 117 responses completed this school year to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 59 additional written responses. Inspectors also reviewed 38 responses from members of staff to their online questionnaire, and a survey of pupils' views completed by the school earlier this school year.