

Dear Parent / Carer,

30th June 2020

As you will be aware, Ofsted carried out an inspection of the school on 11th and 12th February 2020, and I am writing to advise you that Ofsted have now published their report. Inspectors used a range of both current and historical information about the school to form their judgement during the two days they were with us. A copy of the report can be read here: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. If you would prefer a paper copy, please contact the school. This letter is also intended to support parents, carers and learners to understand the judgements, and to provide further information regarding the school's response.

This inspection was carried out some months ago now, and whilst the publishing of the report has been delayed due to the current Covid-19 crisis, this has meant that, as a school, we have been able to develop and implement clear actions in order to continue to focus on the areas for improvement. The majority of the recommendations from the inspection team had already been identified previously by the leadership team through our own evaluations of the school, and in the verbal feedback provided at the time, the inspection team recognised that more time is needed to further develop and fully embed the improvements necessary. Whilst as a whole staff we are deeply disappointed with Ofsted's judgement of our school, we recognise that there needs to be continued further improvement, and we are fully determined and committed to address all of the recommendations highlighted in the report.

Robust plans are in place to accelerate the pace of change and to urgently tackle the issues raised, building on the improvements we have already made to the curriculum that were noted by inspectors during their visit. As you are aware we have made significant changes to the curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in order to ensure that a wider range of personalised courses are available for our learners to study, as well as continuing to focus on improving the overall quality of provision in classrooms and the development of the knowledge, skills and understanding in each subject area. We were pleased to note that the inspection team recognised this in their report and commented that **“Leaders’ efforts to improve the quality of education are beginning to pay off. Significant changes to the curriculum mean that pupils study a broad range of subjects throughout key stage 3. Within each subject, clear plans ensure that all pupils learn the same topics in the same order. This helps to ensure consistency between classes and promotes equal opportunities.”** As this curriculum had only been introduced in September 2019, there was clear recognition that there is real momentum for change and improvement, and a number of subjects such as English, Art and Drama were highlighted as providing an ambitious curriculum, which is delivered by highly skilled teachers. During the inspection, lessons were only observed in a limited number of subject areas, and we are confident from our own monitoring and quality assurance, that what the inspection team saw in these lessons, is the case in the majority of other subject areas. When any new approach is introduced, it does of course take time to ensure it is fully and consistently embedded and at the time of the inspection, we had not had the time needed to be able to demonstrate this across every subject area, but actions had already been taken to address this and this remains a key area of focus for us moving forward. A considerable amount of work has already taken place during the period of school closure to further develop and strengthen the curriculum across subjects.

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During the recent period of school closure, leaders and teachers have been working hard to ensure that the curriculum has been further developed and actions taken to improve the rigour and consistency needed so that all subject areas have provision in line with expectations. Decisions had already been taken over the past 12 months to strengthen the leadership of a number of curriculum areas, which had been previously underperforming, and the impact of these is already clearly evident. For example, in Maths, History and MFL a team of highly skilled Directors of Learning were appointed and, as a result, the curriculum has been redeveloped and the quality of teaching and overall provision has improved significantly. In Humanities and Science, highly effective Head of Departments were also appointed in the summer term of last year, and the impact of their leadership is clearly evident across all areas of the respective departments. Inspectors recognised this and commented in their report that **“Middle leaders, many of whom have been recently appointed, possess good subject knowledge. They have introduced new systems which are beginning to help pupils to remember what they have learned.”** We are extremely confident that these actions will continue to support the ongoing improvement of examination results for all learners. It is important to note that in terms of examination results, the report doesn't recognise that these demonstrated considerable improvement (including in several subject areas such as maths, triple science, history, geography, technology and computer science) in 2019. This improvement is expected to continue across subjects in 2020 as a result of the actions already taken and the key appointments made to strengthen the leadership of this area at both senior and middle leader level.

With regard to the opinion of the inspection team about the standards of reading and writing, I would like to assure you that this is not typically our experience of what our learners produce in school on a regular ongoing basis. The fantastic results in English year on year for all groups of learners also demonstrates that this is an area on which there is a great deal of emphasis and focus. Our learners consistently achieve above national averages in English, and the development of reading and writing is an integral part of this. However, we have already put plans in place to ensure that literacy is given even greater strategic focus across all areas of the curriculum, and many actions have already been implemented to address this.

The key area for improvement highlighted in the report relates to the behaviour and attitudes of learners. As I have shared with you a number of times previously over the past academic year, this is an area we had already identified as a focus for ongoing improvement, a number of actions had already been taken, and the impact of these has been clearly evident. I am sure you will remember, for example, the changes we introduced relating to mobile phone use in school, and the changes introduced to our behaviour management routines in the summer and autumn terms of 2019. We have seen significant positive impact from these across all areas of school, and our focus remains on this key priority. We had already appointed a second Deputy Headteacher, Mr Chris Major, who joined us in February 2020 shortly after the inspection, and his area of focus is behaviour and attitudes and personal development. In the very short time he has been with us, Mr Major has already delivered training to staff and has been working on the development of our behaviour management approaches and systems to ensure they are robust and will bring about the rapid pace of improvement. The report does recognise that where poor behaviour is seen, it tends to be in the



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subjects where there has been temporary or non-specialist teaching. You will no doubt be aware of the current national recruitment crisis in the teaching profession, with severe shortages in a number of key subject areas. However, whilst we have at times experienced the same difficulties as many schools in recruiting high quality staff to some of these areas, the school has invested heavily in recruitment and we are now in an extremely fortunate position where we are fully staffed with a specialist team of staff, and that these issues relate more to historical context.

The vast majority of our learners are polite and respectful, and demonstrate excellent attitudes to all aspects of school life on a daily basis. We are exceptionally proud of them and everything they achieve, and they are a real credit to themselves, their families and our school. However, we recognise and accept that there needs be further rapid improvement in addressing the behaviour of a minority of learners, who do not demonstrate consistently high standards of behaviour on a daily basis. Actions relating to further development of our behaviour policy, and the ongoing training and development for all staff have already been implemented with further plans in place for the new academic year.

As you are aware, Longdendale is a highly inclusive school, and alongside our school being designated a National Flagship School for Inclusion in February 2020, we were also pleased that the inspection team recognised some of the fantastic practice in place across the school. In May of 2019, Mrs Jas Gill was appointed as the Trust Director for SEND and she has made significant improvements to the overall provision for our SEND learners, and the report notes that **“The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator accurately identifies the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, support for pupils with SEND is improving. Leaders have taken action to ensure that pupils with SEND learn the same things as other pupils in the school.”**

We are pleased that the school's safeguarding processes are recognised as being strong and effective, with praise for the extensive work done by the school to support learners with their mental health and wellbeing. The report recognises that **“Leaders responsible for safeguarding are knowledgeable and skilled. The records they keep are clear and accurate. Leaders work well with external agencies to provide specialist support for pupils. Support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing is especially strong. Pupils and staff are able to access support from trained counsellors.”** This is clearly an important area of our work, which impacts strongly and positively on our learners on a day-to-day basis, and it is pleasing to see the ongoing strategic work of the school in this area recognised.

The inspection team also acknowledged the work already done to support the personal development of all learners. They understood and recognised the purpose and development of our 'Life Skills Curriculum', that was introduced in September 2019 with a focus on supporting the wider development and understanding for our learners. However, we fully appreciate that more time is needed to ensure this is consistently embedded across all year groups, and our curriculum model for September 2020 has already been adapted to provide more opportunities for religious education in line with the recommendation from the inspection team. It was really encouraging to read that

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“Pupils said that some parts of ‘life skills’ gives them helpful information, for example about sex and relationships.” Alongside this, the work we do as a school to support and prepare our learners for the next stage of their education and training was recognised and praised. The report notes that **“Pupils receive effective careers information, advice and guidance. They experience a wide range of learning opportunities about further education and the world of work. More pupils than before choose to remain in education or further training once they leave the school.”**

In their verbal feedback, the inspection team did recognise that there have been significant issues relating to capacity at both Trust and senior leadership level over the past few years, and that the team in place now is relatively new and has not yet had the time to demonstrate the impact needed. The issues relating to capacity at both senior and middle leadership level have already been fully addressed, and whilst we understand that the Ofsted report may cause concern, we are confident that with your continued support, our school will continue to rapidly improve in all of the areas identified. Over the coming weeks and months, the leadership team will be working with everyone in our school community to ensure that all of our plans for improvement are rigorously and consistently implemented at a rapid pace.

Despite the disappointment felt by all of our staff, I have been overwhelmed by their unwavering commitment to both our learners and our school. We have a team of highly skilled and dedicated staff, who are driven by a desire to ensure that we work together to continue to improve our school and provide our young people with the very best in all aspects of provision. This is one that I share, and I am absolutely determined and proud to continue to lead and work collaboratively with all members of our school community to continue to realise our shared vision, and to secure the ongoing rapid improvements necessary.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge that for those of you who have supported the ethos and vision of the school over many years you will, like us, be disappointed by the Ofsted report and feel that it does not recognise the many positive aspects of school life and learner involvement, progress and success. We trust you will continue to recognise the many successes our young people experience at Longdendale High School, and value the education they continue to be provided with. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you to continue to address and improve the areas highlighted in the report, and, as always, your support with this is much appreciated. We will be providing you with an opportunity to share your views to support future improvement planning, and to ask any questions you may have in the very near future. Further details will follow regarding this, but in the meantime, please be assured that as a team, we remain committed to providing your child with the learning experiences and opportunities they so richly deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Jones
Headteacher

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