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Mr Scott Yalden
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Dear Mr Yalden

Short inspection of Looe Community Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019 with Matthew Barnes, 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your recent appointment as headteacher, you have quickly and accurately established priorities. Your strategies are well devised and are building on the successes of the school, as well as addressing those areas that are not as strong as you would like them to be. You are well supported by the leadership team, which is equally committed. Leaders bring energy and innovation to develop classroom practice. These approaches are based on research of effective pedagogical techniques. You place great emphasis on encouraging staff to support each other and reflect on their own and each other's practice. Staff recognise that the leadership team is supportive and considerate of staff well-being. They are overwhelmingly positive about the direction of the school. Parents and carers who responded to the online survey recognise that there are palpable changes in the school's engagement and communication with parents.

Governors share this optimism about the future of the school. There have been substantial changes to the governing body. These have ensured that governors have the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to support and challenge leaders. They have received valuable support from within the trust to develop their role more extensively. A central feature of their plans is to visit the school more regularly so that they have a better first-hand knowledge of the quality of education the school provides. They understand that improvement plans, while detailed in

terms of the actions taken, need to have clearly defined timescales to monitor incremental improvements and to ensure that leaders remain on track to achieve objectives.

You place great emphasis on ensuring that the curriculum is suited to the needs of pupils. Where necessary, this is carefully tailored to support pupils to follow a programme that enables them to achieve and progress to the next stages of their education or into employment.

Your underlying philosophy of 'Bydh gwella gylli' ('Be the best you can be') is reflected in many areas of the school's work, whether it be in academic, sporting, artistic or creative spheres. Pupils are highly positive about the opportunities that are offered and feel that they are encouraged to take on leadership opportunities. They are articulate, positive ambassadors and feel that their successes are recognised and valued.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Overall progress is now in line with the national average. However, there is still a gap between the progress that the current group of pupils make in some areas of the curriculum and that of their peers. This remains a whole-school priority. Crucially, while leaders have identified the barriers that exist for this group of pupils, leaders acknowledge that the evaluation of the impact of individual strategies is not sharp enough.

The school was also asked to develop the use of questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. In response, leaders have provided training to support teachers to develop this aspect of classroom practice. This has resulted in a better understanding of how teachers can gauge pupils' proficiency and adjust planning where necessary. Where this is most effective, teachers recap on previous learning, prompt pupils to elaborate on their thoughts and recraft questions to encourage pupils to provide a rationale for their answers. Where this is not secure, teachers too readily accept the first answer given or ask questions that limit the scope that pupils have to show a higher level of conceptual knowledge.

Finally, the previous inspection report highlighted the need to develop middle leaders' ability to promote consistently high levels of attainment and progress. Therefore, you have strengthened systems to support middle leaders to develop the quality of classroom practice. There is now a better understanding of pupils who do not make the progress of which they are capable, and support is provided to remedy this.

Middle leaders understand the importance of their role and are clear about their responsibilities within individual curriculum areas. They value the support they receive from senior leaders and share an understanding of improvement planning priorities. However, there are still inconsistencies in the way in which teachers apply agreed policies, and this leads to variation in the quality of classroom practice. This view is also reflected in a minority of parental responses received. Therefore, middle leaders do not yet challenge and hold teachers to account with sufficient rigour. You

are now in a position to develop this role further so that, as a collective group, middle leaders have a greater strategic role in supporting leaders in continuing to raise standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated safeguarding lead, you are conscientious in ensuring that safeguarding processes are diligently adhered to. All staff and governors receive the required training and there is a clear system for reporting concerns. The work of the on-site integrated health centre is pivotal to your approach to pupils' well-being. You are justifiably proud of this facility and have well formulated plans to extend the support provided for pupils who are considered to be vulnerable. Staff work with external agencies and follow up concerns in a timely way. Employment checks are thorough, to ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and commented on the positive relationships that exist between older and younger pupils. They understand the new behaviour policy and say that behaviour is largely positive, particularly where pupils are excited by their learning. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare, and that they have a trusted adult to speak to if issues arise. The majority of parents, carers and staff agree that this is a positive aspect of the school environment.

Furthermore, pupils comment positively on the work that they do to promote their personal and social well-being. They understand risk, including when online, and say that they are encouraged to stay fit and healthy. They speak eloquently about their work on respecting the rights of the child, as well as discussing human rights more widely. They understand democracy and exercise this concept when voting for their school council. The 'morning challenge' prompts pupils to consider topical issues or have a go at developing skills such as sign language. Pupils understand the importance of respecting diversity and the need to consider alternative viewpoints. They say that they often reflect on moral issues as part of their age-appropriate curriculum.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on how effectively leaders have addressed the issues arising from the previous inspection report. As described above, leaders have had some success in addressing the issues highlighted but some remain. The new leadership team has already demonstrated the capacity to make improvements. Leaders are continuing to realign strategies to more quickly rectify the areas that are not as strong as they need to be.
- The second line of enquiry centred on the effectiveness of leaders to ensure that the curriculum and the quality of teaching secure strong progress for all pupils. We particularly scrutinised the work of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who, in the past, have not performed as well as their peers.
- Leaders are aware of the areas of the curriculum that are not as strong as others

and have plans in place to address this variability. This has led to a more coherent approach so that the needs of pupils are better met. Leaders have identified the issues that exist for disadvantaged pupils and have allocated additional funding to tackle these. A key element of this is to improve literacy skills. Therefore, leaders have emphasised that all teachers are teachers of English. This is further developed by promoting the importance of reading in key stage 3 and planning regular sessions for all pupils to consider varied texts as part of their daily tutorial. In addition, literacy interventions, led by teaching assistants, support pupils to practise and develop their literacy skills to rectify gaps in understanding.

- Teachers' use of assessment to support the progress of pupils is developing. In the best practice, teachers provide clear and targeted guidance on how pupils can improve the quality of their work. Where this is the case, pupils respond positively and make noticeable improvements. Where teachers' expectations are high, pupils demonstrate an ability to present and organise their work well. They show that they can sustain their writing in a range of contexts and experiment with their vocabulary to develop greater sophistication.
- However, this is not a consistent picture, and, in some subjects, the quality of teachers' guidance is too generic to pinpoint the subject-specific skills that pupils need. Therefore, this limits the ability of pupils to acquire the knowledge and understanding required for GCSE study. Where expectations are not high enough, pupils produce work which is brief, poorly presented or unfinished. Their self-reflection is often cursory and these combined factors prevent pupils from easily building on what they have done before.
- There have been notable improvements to the support provided for pupils with SEND. The leadership of this area is strong, and the team is ambitious for improving outcomes. Teachers regularly receive information about pupils' needs and training supports teachers to plan effectively. Teaching assistants are suitably skilled, and their strengths identified, so that they are well deployed. Pupils are positive about the support they receive, are accessing lessons well and are therefore making improved progress. Leaders regularly track additional interventions to show the impact of this support.
- The final line of enquiry considered how successfully leaders have improved the attendance of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. This is because absence rates, notably persistent absence, are higher than national averages. You have rightly identified the very clear correlation of attendance rates with overall outcomes in your 2018 key stage 4 results. You are therefore working to challenge more stringently when attendance is not good enough. This revised approach, which includes incentives to promote better attendance, has led to a more comprehensive overview of patterns and an improvement in overall figures. However, the more modest improvements in persistent absence figures remain a challenge.
- You have developed materials to support pupils to catch up with the work that they have missed due to absence. You have also directed pupils to the homework club so that they can keep up to date with their learning. At present, however, the onus largely remains with the pupils, and teachers do not always insist that

pupils complete missing work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement plans have clear timescales, so that leaders and governors can regularly evaluate whether actions are having the intended effect
- there is greater clarity about the impact of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils
- pupils are clear on how they can improve the quality of their work and do so
- middle leaders continue to develop their skills, so that they can support leaders to challenge more robustly where agreed strategies are not implemented
- they continue to challenge those pupils who do not attend school regularly.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the beginning of the day, inspectors met with you and your leadership team to agree key lines of enquiry. Following this, we visited lessons with leaders and scrutinised pupils' written work across a range of subjects and age groups. We met with members of the leadership team, the chief executive officer of the trust and representatives of the governing body, curriculum leaders, pastoral managers and pupils. We also evaluated a range of documentation provided by the school, including policies relating to safeguarding. When making final judgements, we considered the 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 22 responses to the staff questionnaire, provided by Ofsted.