

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



28 January 2016

Julie Reilly  
Headteacher  
The Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre  
Stourport Road  
Bewdley  
Worcestershire  
DY12 1BL

Dear Mrs Reilly

### **Short inspection of Bewdley High School and Sixth Form Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2016, with Elizabeth Ellis-Martin, 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 January 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Your strong leadership has established a culture that fosters successfully the academic achievements of pupils and their personal development. Your vision of promoting 'learning for life and achievement for all' permeates the school's practices and procedures. Teachers and all staff share this vision because you inspire them and communicate it with clarity. This ensures that they have high expectations of all pupils regardless of background or ability, and are well focused on meeting the needs of individuals in order that that none are left behind. Parents say that this is a school in which 'every child matters'. Warm relationships between staff and pupils, built on mutual respect, promote a purposeful, orderly atmosphere across the school, and this helps pupils to learn well. Pupils get on well together. They enjoy coming to school and value the many opportunities they are offered to develop their sporting, artistic and personal skills. Pupils feel that their teachers care about them and this is reciprocated in the positive attitudes that the very large majority have towards their learning. The high aspirations nurtured mean that pupils are well-prepared to succeed in the next stage of their learning.

Since the previous inspection, you have continued in your determination to drive standards upward. The previous inspection asked you improve the quality of

teaching at Key Stage 3 by providing greater challenge, securing greater consistency in the quality of marking and ensuring that pupils maintain pace in their learning. You have tackled the recommendations offered from the previous inspection. Your success in this is demonstrated in a number of ways.

- The high standards of marking and feedback pupils receive that supports their learning and progress well.
- High-quality assessment systems that give teachers clear information on pupils' abilities, needs and progress that they use to inform their teaching strategies, including at Key Stage 3.
- A focus on pupils' acquisition of learning skills that is reflected in pupils' motivation and willingness to get on with their work in lessons.

Further areas of success include the following examples:

- The improving picture of progress and attainment over time for disadvantaged pupils in a number of subjects, so that gaps between their achievement and that of their classmates and their peers nationally are closing.
- Improved overall attendance, and a reduction in exclusions.
- Continued strong attainment in examination results at the end of Year 11, that is at least in line with or above national average in several key measures. This includes the proportion of pupils securing five or more A\* to C grades, attainment in English, mathematics and across pupils' best eight subjects. In 2015, these measures showed improvements on the previous academic year. Very high attainment was secured in some subjects such as art and English literature.
- Pupils' excellent rates of progression to appropriate destinations when they leave school or the sixth form.

However, you are not complacent. Your self-evaluation clearly acknowledges that in some areas, standards dipped last academic year. For example, the progress that pupils made in mathematics, which had been well above national norms, declined to broadly average and some groups, particularly lower-ability pupils, did not achieve as well as they should have. Pupils also did not achieve as well in science as they have done in the past, nor in modern foreign languages. You have clearly identified the reasons for this and acted swiftly to ensure that improvements are secured. As a result, the signs of strong recovery are emerging and inspection findings support this view.

A prominent feature of your improvement strategy is the implementation of robust systems for tracking the progress of pupils. The rigorous analysis of assessment information ensures that leaders at all levels and teachers are highly aware of the performance of pupils in their areas. This analytical feedback enables quick and well-coordinated action to be taken in order to arrest any identified underachievement. Staff are held to account for ensuring that pupils make good progress. Furthermore, pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are progressing through the assessment information that they receive. This awareness encourages them to want to do well.

Governors have reconstituted and some long-serving members have recently left the governing body. Governors possess a wide range of skills and expertise that help them to carry out their duties. The regular, clear reports that they receive are supplemented by whole-day development sessions hosted by leaders. These sessions help governors to understand the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school's provision. They are increasingly able to ask searching questions that challenge leaders and make sure that leaders tackle any identified underperformance. Governors are highly committed to promoting the school's values and ethos.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding fulfils statutory requirements. A clear policy, supported by comprehensive staff training ensures that all staff at the school are conversant with national guidance and vigilant to the range of risks that pupils may face, including those of radicalisation, extremism and child sexual exploitation. Governors and leaders actively promote a culture in which staff are made aware that 'it could happen here'.

High priority is given to the well-being of pupils, and effective work with the local authority and other agencies ensures that swift action is taken to keep pupils safe from harm. The quality of care, guidance and support, particularly for vulnerable pupils, is a strength of the school's work. This is reflected strongly in the views of parents, pupils and staff. Pupils say that they feel safe and that they feel confident sharing concerns with adults at that school. They have an appropriate awareness of a range of risks, and understand how to stay safe and healthy, both physically and emotionally.

The school promotes the values of tolerance, respect and equality well. This is, for example, shown in the sensitive approach the school has taken to the inclusion of transgender pupils. Bullying occurs occasionally, but is dealt with effectively. There are very few incidents of discriminatory bullying. Pupils confirm that this is the case. A small minority of parents expressed concerns that bullying was not resolved quickly in their responses to the Parent View survey. However, this is not a view shared by the large majority.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils start at the school with broadly average attainment. By the time they leave the school, they attain standards that are at least in line with, and often better than, national average. However, last year there was a dip on previously very strong performance in some areas, notably mathematics and science. The effective action leaders have taken in response to these outcomes is reflected in the quicker progress the current Year 11 are making. Current pupils are expected to achieve high standards.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils has improved over time. However, the gaps between their attainment and that of their classmates and peers nationally is not closing consistently enough across all subject areas. This is

because disadvantaged pupils make slower progress in some subjects than others in the school. Leaders have ensured that additional funding is carefully directed to provide extra help in subjects such as English and mathematics, access to a range of additional support to meet behavioural, social and emotional needs, promote good attendance and raise aspirations. The impact of this work is, for example, shown in the better progress pupils make as a result of additional support in lessons. However, leaders are aware that there is further work to do.

- Teaching is improving because of the training and support teachers receive. Leaders systematically and regularly check teaching and pupils' work to tackle identified weaknesses. This support is successful in helping teachers to develop their practice. Systems for managing the performance of teachers have been overhauled since the previous inspection. These ensure that teachers are held to account for improving the quality of their teaching and for making sure that the pupils they teach make good progress.
  
- Strong teaching in the school is typified by well-structured lessons, clarity of explanation informed by teachers' good subject knowledge, and effective questioning that probes pupils' learning and challenges them to think deeply. The written feedback that pupils receive is often of a high quality and 'marking moments' give pupils time to reflect on, and implement, the advice their teachers offer. Pupils articulate the benefits of this practice on their learning and progress. Regular feedback from assessments means that pupils have a good understanding of how well they are progressing. However, sometimes pupils can be vague on how to get to the next stage. Many teachers check the pupils' understanding well, but at times these checks are not made quickly enough. As a consequence, some pupils struggle to make progress because their misconceptions have not been addressed. Although much work is challenging, including at Key Stage 3, it is not always demanding enough to promote the rapid progress of the most-able pupils.
  
- Pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs benefit from extensive, well-developed support. Teaching assistants provide effective guidance in lessons because they understand the needs of the pupils they support well. This ensures that these pupils are fully involved in lessons and it has a positive impact on their progress.
  
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning, encouraged by the good relationships they share with their teachers, support their learning well. Pupils work industriously and conscientiously on tasks and take pride in their work. In a small number of lessons, when tasks are set that do not inspire pupils' interests, the pace of learning can slow and a small minority can stray off-task. Pupils conduct themselves in an orderly and sensible manner around the school site and during break times. Pupils' good and improving behaviour is further reflected in the school's own records and in the low current rates of fixed-term exclusions. Effective work with the most challenging pupils by

directors of learning, the behaviour support team and external agencies, is helping pupils who may present challenging behaviour to improve their conduct.

- Attendance has improved and is line with national average. However, although improving, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is not yet as high as that of their peers, and a greater proportion are regularly absent from school. Leaders are continuing to tackle this through close work with families, and, where necessary, by taking appropriate legal action.
- Leaders have adapted the curriculum in order that it better meets the needs and aspirations of pupils by, for example, extending the range of vocational qualifications available at Key Stage 4 to supplement the already broad range of academic qualifications on offer. Additional time has been allocated to English and mathematics in order to sustain improvements over time, and suitable adaptations are made to provide lower-ability pupils on entry, with extra time to secure their basic skills. Subjects such as mathematics have restructured their curriculum at Key Stage 3 so that it provides greater levels of challenge for pupils. The impact of these changes is shown in the improving rates of progress of current pupils across year groups.
- Pupils enjoy a range of opportunities to read. Pupils in Key Stage 3 undertake weekly reading lessons. The library is well used, and book loans have increased considerably over the last three years. Pupils read fluently and expressively. Their good literacy skills are further promoted by the regular opportunities they have to produce extended writing across a breadth of forms and genres.
- The school provides a flourishing range of opportunities for pupils to indulge and develop their personal, musical, artistic, performance and sporting skills. A high number of pupils engage in the Duke of Edinburgh award programme, and pupils participate in community events, competitions and contribute to charitable causes. These help pupils to acquire a strong understanding of what it means to be a responsible citizen.
- Good access to impartial careers advice, through shared arrangements with ContinU Trust, and a structured programme of careers education, including work experience placements, and partnerships with the higher education and employment sector, have meant that all pupils enter employment, education, or training when they leave the school. The success of this work is also reflected in the strong in-year retention rates in the sixth form, and the higher than average, and rising, proportion of learners who take up places at university on leaving the sixth form.
- The school's 'progress pathways' system has successfully secured a whole-

school focus on supporting pupils in all year groups to achieve well. Subject leaders and pastoral leaders routinely scrutinise this information to inform 'Raising Achievement Plans'. These plans identify accurately the groups of pupils who need additional support and intervention to improve, featuring, for example, a suitable focus on disadvantaged pupils and the most-able. The onus placed on pupils in all year groups means that underachievement is being identified early and this is creating the building blocks for sustainable improvements. However, at times these plans lack both measurable targets against which the success of leaders' actions can be gauged and clearly defined processes for monitoring actions. This limits leaders' abilities to evaluate and thus articulate the impact of their actions and be held to account for bringing about positive change.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Strategies to improve the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils are rigorously monitored and reviewed in order to identify the most efficient and effective practices.
- Leaders' plans for improvement set out measurable criteria against which the success of their actions can be checked and evaluated, so that leaders are sharply focused on the differences that their actions make and can be robustly held to account.
- Teachers make systematic checks on the learning of pupils in order that pupils, including the most-able pupils, disadvantaged pupils, those pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs receive the right levels of support and challenge to make quick progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Education for Worcestershire Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors met with you, as the headteacher, and members of your senior leadership team. Inspectors spoke to pupils during the inspection in lessons and during the school day, and also took into consideration 26 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. Additional meetings were held with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and middle leaders. Inspectors observed pupils'

learning in lessons with leaders and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Additional documentation was analysed, including reports to governors, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, records of the progress and attainment of current pupils in the academy, and information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and welfare. Inspectors also considered 90 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 13 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.