

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Helen McAndrew
Headteacher
Manchester Secondary PRU
Mersey Valley Campus
Barlow Hall Road
Chorlton
Greater Manchester
M21 7JJ

Dear Ms McAndrew

Short inspection of Manchester Secondary PRU

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2017 with Doreen Davenport, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school directly manages eight learning centres across the city. In order to meet the high demand for places, as well as support the wide range of pupils' needs, you commission places from five local independent schools. The school also works in partnership with The Manchester College to provide additional places for Year 11 pupils. Pupils who attend your school are permanently excluded, identified as at high risk of permanent exclusion or otherwise without a school place. Some of your pupils remain on the roll of their mainstream schools. Since the previous inspection, you have restructured your staffing in response to the increased numbers of pupils on roll.

You have taken the school from strength to strength since the previous inspection. Your relentless pursuit for excellence has made sure that every aspect of the school's work has improved.

Your inspirational leadership is key to the success of the school. Local headteachers hold you in high regard, your staff have absolute confidence in you and parents appreciate the positive difference your school makes to their children's lives. Your ambitious vision for the school is shared by the local authority, local headteachers, the governing body and your staff. One member of staff told inspectors: 'Our

headteacher is an outstanding leader who tirelessly works for the benefit of our current and future pupils.'

You take the management of such a complex organisation in your stride. You make communication across the different sites and between the different teams a top priority. Staff value the regular site, school and team meetings. The well-considered systems and procedures that you have put in place are followed across all your sites and teams. Regular checks by senior managers make sure that policies are applied consistently. As a result, the school runs like 'a well-oiled machine'.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked hard to support the independent schools from which you commission places. You provide training and support for the proprietors and staff at these schools to secure the same high-quality provision as at the sites you directly manage. The intensive support and training you provide is well received by these schools. As a result of this work, outcomes for pupils at these schools are catching up quickly with those for pupils at your own sites.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to raise pupils' achievement in writing. Pupils' work shows how you have increased the opportunities for pupils to write at length. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 10 were working on an extended piece of writing in response to the 'haunting' scene in 'The Woman in Black'. The teacher encouraged pupils to practise their drafting skills, understand how to gain marks in examinations and improve their resilience to write at length. The English subject leader conducts regular work scrutiny and lesson observations. The school's actions have increased the proportions of pupils at key stage 3 who are making good or better progress and the proportion of key stage 4 pupils who are gaining a qualification in English.

You have increased capacity in the attendance team to follow up on pupils' absence. Staff and pupils are in no doubt of the importance of coming to school on time every day. Parents talked to inspectors about how much their children enjoy coming to school. Staff make sure that any absence is followed up quickly every morning. Your attendance team provides intensive support to parents who struggle to get their child to school. Senior leaders keep a close eye on pupils' attendance to make sure that staff actions are making a positive difference. Consequently, almost all pupils improve their attendance when they join the school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors also asked you to make better use of information on pupils' prior learning to set targets. Your staff make good use of information to measure the progress each pupil needs to make to catch up with pupils with similar starting points. Teachers now set targets which help pupils address the gaps in their learning as well as make up lost ground. Teachers know their pupils well. This helps them plan interesting lessons with activities which challenge their pupils. Pupils' headteachers and parents appreciate the frequency and quality of the information you provide about pupils' progress. You and your deputy headteachers use this information well to make sure that intervention is put in place swiftly for any pupils falling behind. Consequently, most pupils enjoy their lessons and make good progress.

You are mindful that although your leaders and managers have got off to a flying start following your restructure, it is important to make sure that they continue to receive training and support. You recognise that they have a key role to play in your ambitious plans for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The pastoral manager and her team are an asset to the school. The pastoral manager has made sure that safeguarding is 'everybody's business'. All staff are up to date with their training. A significant proportion of staff have been trained to levels much higher than required, which reflects the importance you attach to this aspect of your work. There are robust systems and procedures in place which ensure that all referrals are followed up thoroughly. The pastoral manager makes sure that record-keeping is meticulous. Staff act on advice from their specialist colleagues as well as external agencies.

Pupils have good relationships with staff. Pupils are confident that there are adults whom they trust, and in whom they would confide. Pupils say that there is no bullying. Pupils agree that no one is treated differently because of their sexuality, race or religion. As a result, pupils are adamant that they feel safe at school. Parents and staff strongly agree.

Inspection findings

- Governors, quite rightly, were concerned about the limitations of the remit of the management committee, so they reconstituted as a governing body. The governing body carried out a skills audit which identified some gaps in skills, experience and expertise. Newly appointed governors, for example a recently retired headteacher, have imbued the governing body with a new lease of life and filled the gaps. Governors make good use of available training. Consequently, governors are better equipped to ask leaders challenging questions and provide useful advice and guidance.
- Pupils are generally polite and respectful. They listen attentively to their teachers and follow instructions. Any incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly and sensitively. All staff, including those who do not work directly with the pupils, have been trained in using de-escalation strategies as well as positive handling. Comprehensive records of behavioural incidents are kept at each site. This information is used to review school procedures as well as update pupils' targets. Consequently, pupils are able to get on with their learning without disruption, and exclusions are reducing.
- Although many pupils have failed to respond to the support put in place by their mainstream schools, most re-engage with education and make a success of their time at your school. For many, this opportunity comes too late to turn around their academic fortunes before they leave school. Your partnership with The Manchester College is paying dividends. Pupils appreciate the 'tasters' of a range of vocational courses, face-to-face interviews with careers advisers and support to help with transition from school to college. As a result, the vast majority of

pupils move on to education, employment or training. However, you have identified that you now need to do more to make sure that pupils make well-considered choices and that support is in place when plans do not work out.

- You make good use of the up-to-date information about pupils' achievement which is now collected at the end of each half term. You keep a close eye on the attainment and progress of all your pupils, taking decisive action as required when troubling patterns and trends emerge. The frequent meetings between senior and middle leaders, as well as with leaders from the other schools, ensure that no time is lost in addressing any underperformance.
- Subject leaders make sure that they are well informed about the quality of teaching and learning in their subject across the schools and use this information effectively to further improve outcomes. Recently, you revised the marking and feedback policy in response to their findings from work scrutiny and lesson observations. Consequently, your pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.
- You have improved your curriculum offer since the previous inspection. You have made sure that you now offer courses leading to recognised qualifications. These stand pupils in good stead to return to mainstream school or move on to college. Pupils, across the school, now study six core subjects that lead to GCSE qualifications. There were pleasing improvements in pupils' performance in English, mathematics, science and art at the end of key stage 4 in 2016. You have invested heavily in training for your subject leaders and subject teachers. Your pupils are now reaping the rewards of this training. Teachers have sound subject knowledge, use subject-specialist vocabulary with confidence, ask challenging questions, and plan interesting and engaging lessons.
- You make sure that you keep a close eye on the key groups in your school, including disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils have benefited from the improvements which you have made, for example funding specialist science teachers at key stages 3 and 4. However, you recognise that you do not yet have a detailed enough understanding of the performance of this significant group, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, you cannot be certain that your actions are helping these pupils to overcome their specific barriers to learning.
- Good teamwork is a key ingredient in your success. You have made sure that the staffing structure is clear and understood by everyone. Staff know what everyone's roles and responsibilities are. Staff feel valued by senior leaders as well as by their colleagues. They appreciate the wealth of information and training they receive to help them to do their jobs well. Everyone is able to make a contribution to the school improvement plan through their performance management targets. Consequently, staff enjoy coming to work and are proud to be part of the school. As one member of staff reported to inspectors, 'Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit is a unique school with unique pupils and staff who inspire me every day.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they review:

- the school's strategy in respect of the pupil premium so that the funding is used to address the specific barriers faced by eligible pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
- quality assurance processes for independent schools at which the school commissions places so that they can more swiftly identify any shortfalls in the quality of the schools' provision and take decisive action.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met with you, senior teachers, teaching and support staff. An inspector met the chair and two members of the governing body. We also spoke with representatives of the local authority. Inspectors visited three of the school's sites: Mersey Valley Campus, West Gorton Learning Centre and Clayton Learning Centre. Only one parent responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, so inspectors considered the school's own surveys of parents as well as speaking to some parents by telephone. We met formally with a group of staff and considered the 57 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted's online survey, so inspectors spoke formally to a group of pupils as well as informally to pupils both in lessons and at breaktimes. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning. We also observed pupils around the different sites during the school day. We made visits to classrooms with senior leaders. We looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. We conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.