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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Susanne Staab
Headteacher
The Norton Knatchbull School
Hythe Road
Ashford
Kent
TN24 0QJ

Dear Ms Staab

Short inspection of The Norton Knatchbull School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2017 with Jennifer Bray, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You are a clear and thoughtful leader who is passionate about the school. You are supported ably by your senior team together with your middle leaders, all of whom are dedicated to improving the school. Governors are committed and loyal to the school and have a range of useful professional skills. They meet regularly with school staff and are about to undertake an external review of their work to improve their effectiveness further. You know your school very well and are focusing on the right things to make it even better. Since the last inspection, you have concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, pupils achieve highly and more of them now gain top level grades at GCSE and A level.

There is a welcoming and harmonious atmosphere among pupils. During the inspection we saw many examples of pupils working collaboratively together and listening respectfully to each other. One example of this was during the hustings for the election of the head boy and head girl. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and there is a shared sense of aiming high. Pupils' welfare is a top priority and pupils told inspectors they feel well supported and encouraged to do their best. Many parents support this view, with one saying, 'This is a supportive school which values both the academic, social and moral development of its pupils. My children are very happy.' Pupils are confident, keen to learn and ambitious for their futures. They behave very well both in lessons and around school. As a result,

pupils make good, and often better, progress across a range of subjects.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors tasked leaders to further improve the quality of teaching and learning, by ensuring that staff had consistently high expectations of what pupils could achieve, pupils knew the next steps in their learning, and pupils developed more confident reading, writing and communication skills.

Leaders have addressed these issues and clear improvements have been made. School staff now use assessment information much more rigorously to track how much progress pupils are making. Where pupils are identified as falling behind, a range of interventions is put in place to help them catch up.

You have encouraged teachers to plan lessons that follow your 'ACE' programme (Assessment, Challenge, Engagement) to ensure that all pupils, particularly the most able, are challenged to think hard. To support this strategy, you have implemented a personalised training programme for staff to help them to meet better the needs and abilities of individual pupils in lessons. As a result, teachers now give much more meaningful advice to pupils on how to improve their work. However, you recognise that there is some variation across subjects in teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve and that some pupils could still make faster progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong ethos of safeguarding within the school and pupils agree that the school is a safe place in which to learn. All statutory checks are carried out methodically and record-keeping is very thorough. Governors ensure that safeguarding has high priority and that they and the staff are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures. There is good cooperation between the school and outside agencies.

Pupils know who to go to if they have a problem. They say bullying is rare and, if it does happen, it is dealt with. They value greatly the help of the pupil support managers in helping them to sort out any difficulties they may have. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, and the wide-ranging assembly programme contributes greatly in this regard. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. This is due to speedy action by school staff when these pupils are not in school, which makes sure that these pupils are safe. There are some excellent strategies in place to help targeted pupils attend school and to reach out to vulnerable families.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked at the progress that pupils were making across a range of subjects, especially the most able and the disadvantaged. From visiting lessons and examining pupils' work in their books, it is clear that the most able pupils are generally making good progress from their starting points. This is also true of disadvantaged pupils, although some of them struggle to begin the

work set and need more help from teachers to get them on the right path.

- You use pupil premium funding well and your dedicated inclusion manager is having an impact in supporting disadvantaged pupils to make faster progress. Performance information is now used more effectively to monitor pupils' progress and put interventions in place. The current English and mathematics interventions for Year 11 pupils during tutor time are having particular impact in consolidating learning and preparing pupils for their forthcoming examinations. Pupils told inspectors that they greatly appreciated this extra help and having the opportunity to shape the intervention programme with their own ideas.
- Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account for the progress that pupils make and they meet together regularly to discuss the current picture. However, you recognise that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils are challenged to make even faster progress. Governors also appreciate that they need to keep a sharper eye on how much progress pupils are making.
- We also looked at the consistency of the quality of teaching between subjects and focused especially on English. Inspectors saw examples of very good questioning in English, history and politics which probed pupils' understanding and made them think hard. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and this was seen particularly in chemistry and in modern foreign languages, where the teacher used French to communicate with the class throughout the lesson. Pupils are confident to answer questions in class and do so in a very articulate way. This reflects the success of the school's strategies to improve their communication skills.
- Standards in English are rising quickly due to strong leadership. Pupils' work in English is assessed regularly and teachers' guidance to pupils is having a clear impact in helping pupils to deepen their knowledge and develop their skills. In English books, pupils present their work thoughtfully and neatly and have many opportunities for writing in an extended way. However, in other subjects you recognise that there is some variability in the expectations that teachers have of pupils with regard to the presentation of their work, the level of challenge and the quality of the advice given to pupils to help them improve.
- Another aspect of the school's work that we considered with you was the outcomes for sixth-form students, particularly those joining the sixth form from external institutions. Sixth-form students have a very businesslike demeanour and a purposeful attitude to their studies.
- Overall, students are making good progress from their starting points. They appreciate the opportunities they have in the sixth form but some told inspectors they would welcome a better balance between their academic studies and social engagement activities to promote their well-being. Much of the work in class is delivered in a tutorial style which is very good preparation for post-18 destinations. A strong feature of lessons is the genuine dialogue between students and staff and between students themselves. Students expect to be challenged, are eager to learn and are very ambitious.
- Students joining the sixth form from other schools sometimes need help in catching up. One of the specific strategies in place to do this is the bridging

programme which enables students joining the sixth form to do preparation work in advance. Once they begin their studies at the school, students needing extra help are identified early and their progress is tracked rigorously. As a result of the help they receive in class, students joining the sixth form from external institutions are now making better progress. You have rightly identified strategies to encourage more pupils to stay on in the sixth form, including more timely careers advice and guidance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work even more closely together to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work
- there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching so that all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
- pupils are given even more challenging work to enable them to make faster progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Paula Sargent
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your leadership team, middle leaders and staff responsible for attendance and the sixth form. I also met five members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and had a separate meeting with your school improvement partner. We met pupils in all year groups informally in lessons and a range of pupils in a formal meeting in which we discussed their learning and views on school life. We visited learning across a range of subjects and year groups together with members of the leadership team. Inspectors also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books. We looked at a range of school documentation including current assessment information, the school's improvement plan, self-evaluation and attendance information for current pupils. Inspectors considered the 251 responses to the pupil questionnaire, 53 responses to the staff questionnaire, 173 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 164 written comments made by parents.