

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Lindsey Cooke
Headteacher
Hanley Castle High School
Church End
Hanley Castle
Worcester
Worcestershire
WR8 0BL

Dear Mrs Lindsey Cooke

Short inspection of Hanley Castle High School

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2017 with my colleague Mark Feldman, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and your governors share a powerful common vision for the school. You are passionate about success for every child and are determined to help each individual overcome any barriers or challenges. The level of care provided for each pupil is remarkable and no stone is left unturned in finding solutions to difficult situations. Being successful at Hanley Castle is not just about academic success. There is a wealth of enrichment activities, including international exchange visits, music, drama and sporting opportunities, scope to engage with the world of work and chances to volunteer and help others.

The school has sustained and built on the strengths evident at the last inspection. The great majority of pupils continue to make good progress across a wide range of subjects. Teaching is engaging and motivating. Teachers have built on the areas identified at the last inspection and ensure that work is more closely matched to pupils' needs. Pupils tell us they enjoy their lessons and believe their teachers expect them to work hard and do their best. The sixth form continues to be a real strength of the school with excellent results in academic and vocational courses, increasing numbers, a wide-reaching enrichment programme and very successful progression for students into work, training or university.

Since the last inspection, there has been measurable success for pupils supported by pupil premium funding and there are many examples of significant achievement

for individuals. Disadvantaged pupils have seen improvements in their GCSE performance and in their attendance. However, gaps remain between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers. Leaders have further adapted the curriculum and intervention strategies in the light of 2016 examination results and they recognise the need to continue to prioritise the performance of these pupils in the future. A small cohort of pupils who arrive at Hanley Castle with low key stage 2 results do not make as much progress as others in the school, and leaders continue to work with teachers and support staff to understand why this happens and how their performance could be improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors take their responsibility to keep pupils safe very seriously. All statutory requirements are met and there is rigorous monitoring of vulnerable pupils. Those responsible for safeguarding training have developed innovative ways to get staff to engage with key issues. Staff have not shied away from tackling challenging issues like female genital mutilation (FGM) and child sexual exploitation in assemblies and pastoral sessions.

Pupils tell us they feel safe in school and are confident about who to talk to if they are worried. Pupil surveys carried out by the school reinforce this. Warm, friendly relationships between staff and pupils were evident throughout our inspection, in classrooms and around the school site at breaktime and lunchtime.

The school site is very open and an important part of the local village community. Leaders have given considerable thought to making the site as safe as possible and ensuring that pupils understand the role they have to play in that.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to monitor closely the progress of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding and instigate targeted plans to support them where appropriate. You have taken this priority very seriously, allocating a member of your senior team to lead this work. Leaders now closely track all disadvantaged pupils, meeting with pastoral leaders, with input from heads of department, to check progress every three weeks and developing action plans for further support. Examination results in 2014 and 2015 reflected the effectiveness of these strategies. Unfortunately, in 2016, a very small number of pupils, despite extensive efforts by the school, did not complete their external examinations, creating a significant gap between the summary performance data for disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers.
- Despite an overall improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school remains far higher than the proportion for their non-disadvantaged peers. The school has effective processes in place for tracking attendance and makes rapid contact with pupils who are absent. Parents are invited into school and home visits are made. The school has had some success with reducing absence levels of disadvantaged pupils in Years 7 to 9 but older pupils still have unacceptably

high levels of persistent absence.

- In 2016, there was some variation in the progress made by pupils in different subject areas. Pupils made excellent progress in humanities and science but did less well in languages than other pupils nationally. Current pupils are still making very good progress in science and humanities as a result of challenging, engaging and motivating teaching and rigorous assessment and intervention. Leaders have taken action to address the pockets of weaker teaching found in languages and made changes to the teaching and intervention programme for pupils' controlled assessment tasks to support better outcomes this year. Pupils highly value languages and it remains a popular option subject, with around 70% of pupils choosing to continue studying a language at key stage 4.
- Pupils who arrive at the school with low prior attainment make less progress than those with middle or high attainment on entry. The school recognises this and has put in place a number of long-term strategies to support their progress. Teachers are provided with simple one-page plans that identify the main learning needs of each pupil and a team of well-trained learning support assistants work with pupils in lessons. In key stage 3, these strategies are already having a measurable impact on pupils' progress. A reading tutor has recently been appointed, although it is too early to measure the impact of this work. In addition to this targeted support, leaders are reviewing whether teachers have high enough expectations for these pupils and are considering other teaching strategies that may further improve outcomes.
- Pupils are keen to learn and behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite, respectful and welcoming to visitors. They work well together, support each other and are proud of their school. Sixth-form 'volunteers' have a highly visible presence during breaktime and lunchtime, providing valued additional support for the staff on duty. The school has good mechanisms in place to reward good behaviour and address incidents of disruption. Despite this background of good behaviour, the number of permanent exclusions rose last year. Inspectors are satisfied that these exclusions were an action of last resort following significant intervention and support from the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those most likely to be persistently absent from school, improves so that it at least matches the national average
- teachers expect the highest possible progress from pupils with low attainment on entry and deliver resources and activities that support this
- improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils continues to be a high priority for the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of childrens services for Worcestershire. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your senior team, members of the local governing body and the Hanley and Upton Educational Trust. We also met with a number of other staff, including the special educational needs coordinator, the head of sixth form and a key stage coordinator. We reviewed documents, including safeguarding policies, analysis of pupils' achievement, and attendance records. We visited lessons in all year groups and across a wide range of subjects to observe learning. We looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We spoke to pupils in lessons and around the school and observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. We took account of the 175 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and considered the 24 staff and 24 pupil responses to the Ofsted survey.

At our initial meeting, we agreed to focus on the following areas during this inspection:

- the effectiveness of the work being done by leaders to improve the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- the performance of Year 11 pupils in GCSE language examinations in 2016
- the progress made by pupils with low prior attainment on entry to the school
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.