

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Mike Collier
Headteacher
Walker Technology College
Waverdale Avenue
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE6 4AW

Dear Mr Collier

Short inspection of Walker Technology College

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Julie McGrane, 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 May 2014.

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 leaders and governors are determined that every pupil should succeed and meet their potential, regardless of any barriers. All staff treat pupils with respect and are committed to providing them with a high standard of education. They are proud to work at the school and as a result morale is high.

Pupils benefit from a community ethos throughout the school, and you and other leaders remain committed to ensure that the school is a great place to learn for your pupils. The pupils and the students in the sixth form feel supported, both academically and pastorally; because of this, they are confident and assured young people. The result of this community ethos is close working relationships between pupils and between the pupils and the staff. The house system, which is an integral part of the school and its history, gives pupils a clear understanding of their academic and personal achievements. It is also an important part of the school's community spirit and consequently pupils' sense of identity and immense pride in the school.

Pupils move around the school in a calm and orderly way, and they wear their uniform impeccably. The vast majority of pupils follow school rules and they are welcoming and respectful to each other, adults and visitors. The pupils spoken to during the inspection gave a genuine sense of pride about being part of the school and informed us that people at the school care for and about each other.

Some pupils are temporarily educated at your 'turnaround care' provision. These pupils are provided with support to improve their behaviour, their attitudes and their social skills. Ultimately, the aim is for these pupils to be reintegrated into the main school community so that they can achieve suitable qualifications. There are clear examples of success stories.

Pupils have access to a broad curriculum, which includes a range of academic and vocational courses such as geography, Spanish, sociology, child development and care, and cadet training. In order to improve the curriculum on offer, you and your deputy headteacher are reviewing and refining it so that it aligns with your concept of being a 'principled curriculum', where pupils will choose and follow the courses that are much better suited to their individual needs and future aspirations.

There is a strong focus on giving pupils quality careers advice and guidance through well-planned activities in all year groups. This gives pupils the support they need to make informed choices about their future. It also provides those students who continue in the sixth form tailored advice so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. The vast majority of pupils in Year 11 and sixth-form students move on to appropriate further or higher education, employment or training.

Governance is a strength of the school. Governors are actively involved in the school community and consequently know its strengths and weaknesses well. As a group, they ably hold leaders to account. They ask probing and challenging questions to examine the quality of education being provided. For example, governors receive weekly updates from leaders and they use these updates to challenge leaders about the performance of subjects, groups of pupils and attendance issues. Governors have a wide and appropriate range of skills and because of this play a strong part in the operational and strategic direction of the school.

Since the previous inspection, you have dealt with the areas for improvement identified. In particular, through the school's policy, planning and approach to literacy, pupils' skills are being enhanced. For example, the focus on improving pupils' writing across a wide range of subjects is evident in subjects such as science and mathematics. Also, ensuring that pupils pay attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar has provided opportunities for pupils to reflect and learn from their mistakes. Current Year 7 and Year 8 pupils' literacy skills, particularly their speaking and listening skills, are developing because they are benefiting from a bespoke programme of support in the 'connect' group. As a result of this provision, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who have low prior attainment are making better progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records kept are detailed and of good quality. All staff, including governors, are trained in, and kept up to date with, all relevant safeguarding issues and concerns.

A strength of the school is the personalised care and support it provides for individual pupils who may be experiencing difficulties. A strong pastoral team, linked to the school's house system, helps pupils deal with difficulties so that they can take part in school life. The actions that the school takes are effective and in some instances these actions result in an improvement in attitudes and behaviour of individual pupils.

Pupils feel safe at school, they enjoy it and they all say that bullying rarely happens. Pupils are taught, and are able to articulate confidently and maturely, how to keep themselves safe. They are well aware of risks, for example using social media safely and appropriately.

Pupils are unanimous in their view that difference and diversity are celebrated as part of the school community. One pupil eloquently stated, 'Everyone is treated the same; we are all equal.' Parents are supportive of the school, and their comments indicate this. Pupils' and parents' confidence in the school is testimony to the community ethos that underpins the school's work.

Some challenges remain around the attendance of some pupils not being good enough. However, leaders acknowledge this and have subsequently initiated new strategies which are already having an impact.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have acted swiftly to address areas of underachievement. You and your deputy headteacher, ably supported by senior and middle leaders, rigorously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, leaders know the school well and have the capacity to develop and improve it further.
- Leaders continue to secure improvements in relation to all pupils' progress and attainment. For example, in 2016, based on below-average starting points, pupils' progress in English and mathematics was above the national picture for all groups of pupils. This was also the case in modern foreign languages. Provisional results for 2017 indicate that the percentage of pupils attaining a 4 or above in both English and mathematics has improved. This trend of improvement continues in mathematics. Leaders' concerted efforts have also brought about improvements in the percentage of pupils attaining A* to C grades in GCSE geography and separate sciences, especially A*/A grades in chemistry and physics. They know, however, that there is still work to do in history so that all pupils make the progress expected of them.
- Leaders' efforts to raise standards for the most able pupils are an ongoing priority for the school. You have tasked curriculum leaders to work with their departments so that the most able pupils are appropriately challenged in their learning.
- Curriculum leaders are well aware of their responsibilities and show a determined and measured approach as to how they will work with their department colleagues to raise standards overall. You have provided curriculum leaders with professional development time to collaboratively improve their knowledge, skills

and understanding of the new national specifications. This time is being used in departments to plan opportunities to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further in the school. This professional development is showing early signs of having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

- Students in the sixth form are well guided when making their subject choices. Such guidance ensures that students access the study programmes that meet their needs and future aspirations. Students appreciate the expert levels of support they receive, for example when completing UCAS applications, applying and preparing for apprenticeships or employment. They also appreciate the support they receive with their personal development and welfare, for example students speak about how they appreciate opportunities to discuss and explore local and national issues with each other and staff.
- Students' outcomes in vocational courses are very good, but more varied in academic subjects. Leaders are aware of this and a newly appointed senior leader has a brief to improve the 16 to 19 provision.
- Attendance overall and for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is showing signs of improvement. This is because the school has implemented a raft of strategies in order to address this stubborn issue. For example, school leaders and governors have invested in buses to pick pupils up and get them into school. They have also invested in specialist support staff whose brief is to continually monitor attendance of pupils and where necessary complete home visits. While there are a raft of strategies in place, leaders acknowledge that attendance remains a stubborn issue and it is an issue that they must continue to be relentless to resolve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to review and refine the curriculum on offer, so that all pupils, and particularly the most able, achieve well across the subject areas they choose
- persevere with strategies to improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, we spoke with you, senior leaders, the head of sixth form, the special educational needs coordinator and a group of middle leaders. I met with three representatives from the governing body and my colleague visited your off-site alternative provision. We visited a range of classrooms with senior leaders and reviewed pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. We also undertook a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work. We spoke with pupils throughout the day, both formally and informally. We took account of the 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, as well as 111 staff responses and one pupil response to their respective questionnaires. We evaluated a range of documents provided by the school, including information about safeguarding, monitoring of teaching and learning, improvement plans and logs of behaviour and bullying.