

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 November 2017

Mrs Kirsten Brown
Headteacher
Gilbrook School
Glebe Hey Road
Woodchurch
Wirral
Merseyside
CH49 8HE

Dear Mrs Kirsten Brown

Short inspection of Gilbrook School

Following my visit to the school on 2 November 2017 with Dawn Farrent, 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 outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Gilbrook School is a truly unique place to be, whether you are a pupil, parent or member of staff. You make sure that everyone gets the support needed to be the best that they can be.

Following a difficult period in the school's journey, you, together with the current principal and leadership team, have revised and further strengthened the work of the school. The recent federation with Kilgarth School has given further impetus to the rapid improvements you have made. Safeguarding procedures have been overhauled and you check that everything is in place to keep the pupils safe. Together with the governors, you check that staff are suitably qualified and fit to work with children. Staff have undertaken extensive training to help them to support pupils. This includes training in supporting pupils with autistic spectrum disorder identified as an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. Consequently, adults support pupils with autistic spectrum disorder exceptionally well. You have made changes to the curriculum to make it more meaningful for your pupils. You have also tightened and streamlined systems for checking on what pupils know and can do. As a result, staff know pupils very well and offer exceptional guidance and support.

Your professional curiosity and determination to do the best for every child mean that you never rest on your laurels. You and your staff keep up to date with the

latest developments, both nationally and internationally. You have established innovative partnerships in international research. Staff research what works for pupils and use this to develop best practice at Gilbrook. The local authority has recognised your effective work.

You invest in the well-being and development of your staff as well as your pupils. This investment pays dividends. The consistently strong teaching across school leads to outstanding outcomes for your pupils. You have high aspirations for everyone at Gilbrook. Staff experience high-quality professional development leading to advanced qualifications. This professional development has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

You expect a lot from your pupils and compare outcomes at Gilbrook with that seen nationally in mainstream schools. Consequently, there is no lid put on pupils' learning and development. You make sure that you give those pupils with the potential to reintegrate into a mainstream school every chance of success. You work tirelessly with staff, pupils and their families so that every pupil achieves their best. You recognise that you could do more to develop writing for the youngest pupils and also for the older pupils transitioning to mainstream high schools.

Parents are supportive of the school. They are effusive in their praise. They told us that the school has made a huge difference, not only to the pupils but also to the families. One parent said that you 'don't just support the pupils but also support them as parents'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Record-keeping is meticulous. Staff are alert to any risks and you follow up any concerns swiftly. You and your leadership team are strong advocates for your pupils. You want the best for every one of them and stick up for what you believe is right.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' strong outcomes. You have devised a curriculum that meets the needs of your children exceptionally well. It is also based on research into what works well.
- Your curriculum has the right blend of academic and essential skills. Pupils work within the national curriculum, but you tailor this to the pupils' stage of development and their individual needs. Your curriculum is constantly evolving. For example, you are currently revising the curriculum to include a greater use of the outdoors.
- Pupils make very strong progress from their different starting points. Pupils are proud of their work and the progress they make. Mathematics progress is exceptionally strong. Adults give pupils additional support for phonics. This has a positive impact on developing pupils' reading. Pupils also make particularly strong progress with grammar, punctuation and spelling, although some common

spelling errors remain.

- Pupils also make very good progress from their starting points in writing. In most classes, teachers develop pupils' writing across a wide range of subjects and the quality is equal to that seen in English books. However, teachers give younger pupils too few opportunities to write independently. Teachers could do more to increase the stamina for writing needed for those pupils transitioning to mainstream high schools.
- Teachers and other adults track pupils' progress closely and use this to great effect in their planning. Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. Adults ensure that pupils are ready for their move to a new school. Information is passed on to a pupils' new school, in order that they continue to receive the support they need.
- Additional adults provide outstanding support to pupils, which contributes to pupils' strong rates of progress. Adults work together seamlessly in lessons.
- Pupils attend well. There has been a significant improvement in attendance and this is rising rapidly towards the rates of attendance seen in mainstream schools. This reflects your commitment to compare pupils' achievements with that seen nationally. The improvements in attendance are because of your tireless efforts to make sure that pupils feel safe and nurtured. Adults really listen to pupils and value what they have to say. Consequently, pupils want to come to school. The in-school attendance team ensures that pupils attend. As a result, pupils who have had poor attendance in previous settings, make rapid improvements in their attendance at Gilbrook.
- Pupils at Gilbrook exhibit a range of challenging behaviours. Staff manage these behaviours exceptionally well. Staff intervene calmly and quickly. Pupils feel safe and trust adults to help them. Adults help the pupils to build confidence in their ability to succeed.
- Leaders use the additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities especially well to support the needs of individual pupils. Leaders enhance this funding through some creative partnerships that bring in additional support for pupils. This contributes to the exceptional improvements seen in pupils' behaviour and their outstanding progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Exclusions have reduced dramatically. Records show a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour. This is due to the effective strategies of the new leadership team.
- Governors take their roles very seriously and are passionate about the school. Governors have a detailed understanding of Gilbrook School. They ensure that they keep up to date with their training and have the necessary skills to support and challenge leaders. Leaders use the pupil premium funding particularly well to enable disadvantaged pupils to make the same exceptional rates of progress as others. Governors check regularly to ensure that leaders spend this funding effectively.
- Judicious spending of the sport funding helps to keep pupils fit and active as well as developing their basic skills. Pupils have the opportunity to take part in a variety of sports, including gymnastics, tennis and free-style running. A greater

proportion of pupils than previously take part in active sport.

- Gilbrook plays a vital role in the newly established Aspire Federation. As a group of schools, you are able to find more cost-effective ways of buying in trainers who are world leaders in their field. Your outreach team supports schools and pupils in the local area. The research undertaken by staff contributes significantly to the progress made by pupils and to your ability to support local mainstream schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Pupils' writing is developed further by:
 - giving younger pupils opportunities to write independently
 - building stamina for writing for older pupils to write at length, particularly those who are transitioning to mainstream schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, inspectors met with you, the principal of the federation, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with a representative from the local authority. You and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. Inspectors met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with three parents in the playground before school. Inspectors considered responses to the school's own parent, pupil and staff questionnaires. Inspectors observed pupils in the playground and in the dining hall.

Inspectors conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record-keeping. We talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. Inspectors also considered a range of other documentation, including school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.