

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr William Bancroft
Headteacher
Dallam School
Milnthorpe
Cumbria
LA7 7DD

Dear Mr Bancroft

Short inspection of Dallam School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 2017 with Tanya Sheaff, 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 April/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 and other senior leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, exemplify the values of the school by your confident, caring and outward-looking leadership and through your highly aspirational expectations for pupils. You and other senior leaders have embedded a clear vision for the school's pupils, based upon their development as well-rounded, confident and outward-looking citizens. Staff promote this philosophy in all that they do routinely, and this is a strength of the school. Consequently, the school is a place where pupils are happy, cared for well and successful. For example, there is vigilance in ensuring and supporting pupils' mental well-being, which is monitored and evaluated regularly, including by those responsible for governance. Pupils like coming to school, so they typically behave well, and their attendance figure is better than the national average. Many of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, described the school in very positive terms, typified by the comment, 'A really lovely, supportive and well-balanced school'. Accordingly, the school is highly regarded by the community and routinely receives more applications for places than are available for pupils.

You know the school very well. Therefore, your self-evaluation of the school is precise and accurate. Your plans to address the few areas that need to improve are appropriate and understood by all, including governors. As a result, since your last inspection, you have built upon the school's strengths and led improvement in its

few areas of weakness.

Pupils' transition from primary school to Year 7 and for those who join the school from overseas is managed well. Pupils' specific requirements, including for those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are shared effectively. Consequently, the Year 7 pupils that we spoke to during the inspection were extremely positive about how they have settled into the school. They also said that the work set by teachers is challenging. This was in line with the Year 7 work seen by inspectors.

Pupils have good outcomes across a broad range of subjects and across year groups. In 2017, the progress that Year 11 pupils made in their GCSE examinations across most subjects was in line with the national average, including in English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally.

Teaching is routinely good, including in English and mathematics. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and pupils respond positively to the work that they are set. Pupils read confidently and well, because teachers give them the opportunity to do so regularly. Pupils with low starting points in reading catch up with their peers quickly. Those who already read well access challenging texts, which builds upon this strength. Pupils write well, and some very impressive examples of extended writing were seen by inspectors. Teachers regularly assess pupils' knowledge and understanding, so they are clear on how they can improve, although, as you told us accurately, this is not routinely the case in science. Teachers have been trained to use questioning effectively. Where this training is routinely used well to extend pupils' learning, such as in English, pupils think, speak and work with depth, fluency and confidence. You recognise that some pupils with high starting points do not make the progress that they should, because they are not routinely set challenging enough work.

Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's surveys at the time of the inspection said that the school is well led and managed. Governance is a strength of the school. Governance has been restructured since the last inspection, including by the formation of a multi-academy trust, and new members have been appointed. Governors have skills and experience that support effective governance and they use them to support and challenge the school's senior leaders effectively. Those responsible for governance actively promote the school's vision. They have a clear understanding of the educational standards at the school and their role in supporting their further improvement, where required, and they are effective in maintaining the school's financial well-being.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leadership of this area is a strength of the school. You ensure that staff are charged with prioritising pupils' safety and well-being and that they know the pupils well. Consequently, you have secured a culture of vigilance in staff and pupils. Pupils are aware of risks and know how to remain safe. Staff are regularly updated

about safeguarding issues, including from external agencies to provide additional expertise at times when you have identified specific needs arising. For example, recent support to prevent the misuse of drugs has been successful in supporting pupils. Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are established. The school site is safe and secure. Safeguarding records are detailed and are well maintained.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and most of their parents agreed. They said that bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, is rare and that staff deal with any incidents effectively. Pupils benefit from regular teaching on how to stay healthy and safe. Pupils and parents agreed that pupils' mental well-being, including for those at risk of self-harm, is supported vigilantly and effectively. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe from potential dangers that can arise when using the internet.

You ensure that the small number of pupils who attend an alternative provision are monitored routinely, so they are kept safe when they are studying elsewhere.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we considered during the inspection was the effectiveness of teachers to set work that challenges pupils routinely, so that they make the progress that they should. The pupils' work that we saw matched your own self-evaluation. Leaders set pupils aspirational targets and the progress that pupils make towards these is measured regularly and accurately. Consequently, teachers and leaders know how well pupils are doing and they regularly set work that challenges pupils accordingly. Most pupils make the progress that they should, and many attain the challenging targets that school leaders set. You and those responsible for governance are aware that pupils with high starting points do not always make strong progress, because they are not set challenging enough work in some areas. Accordingly, you are currently working to eradicate this variation.
- The second focus area was the effectiveness of school leaders in monitoring, evaluating and planning to improve pupils' attendance, behaviour and progress to lead to good or better standards. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have improved these aspects of their work effectively since the last inspection. Accordingly, they have a sharply focused knowledge of the current position regarding the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' attendance, behaviour and progress. They use this information to good effect, which has led to sustained improvements. For example, because of effective monitoring and evaluation, leaders were able to recognise and rectify an uncharacteristic rise in fixed-term exclusions quickly.
- Pupils' attendance is monitored and supported effectively. Consequently, it is better than the national average. School leaders use assessment information routinely to identify any pupils or groups of pupils who are at risk of falling behind. They work with teachers to find ways to improve the progress that these pupils are making. Accordingly, pupils make good progress across a broad range of subjects and where there are any current variations, leaders, including those

responsible for governance, are aware of these.

- The third area we looked at was the quality of education provided for students who attend the sixth form and we considered whether the strengths noted at the last inspection had been sustained. We found that the sixth form remains a strength of the school and the curriculum that it offers students is rich and rewarding.
- The range of courses offered has developed since the last inspection. At that time, most pupils from the local community followed A-level courses, while the international students who attend the school usually followed the International Baccalaureate pathway. These pathways have been extended, with vocational courses now being followed by a small group of students. These courses have strong outcomes. International Baccalaureate courses have sustained the excellent outcomes seen at the last inspection, because they are taught very well. Accordingly, they have become more popular with pupils from the local community and half of all courses now followed are in this area. A-level courses remain popular and students make good progress in these qualifications. You are correct in commenting that, as a next step, A-level outcomes should further improve to match the excellent outcomes of the International Baccalaureate.
- Students who join the sixth form without a standard pass in English and/or mathematics are supported effectively to prepare for these examinations. The number who subsequently attain a standard pass far exceeds the national average. Students and parents recognise the excellent opportunities for work experience, extra-curricular activities and personal development, which provide a balanced and rounded study programme. Students are safe and well cared for and supported by staff. They also receive strong and impartial careers guidance. Consequently, students' destinations are impressive. For example, of the most recent leavers, almost all have moved on to further education, with many studying at Russell Group universities, including Cambridge and Oxford.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils with high starting points are provided with challenging work routinely so that they make the progress they should
- students following A-level courses make even better progress, so that they match the excellent outcomes in International Baccalaureate qualifications
- assessment in science is consistently effective, so that pupils always pick up on misconceptions and improve their work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Ruddy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and your senior team visited lessons with us. We looked at the work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their experience of lessons, and behaviour and safety. We held meetings with pupils, school leaders and those responsible for governance. We spoke with representatives from the local authority and the South Lakes Federation. We looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, attendance and behaviour records, the pupil premium plan and safeguarding records. We considered the views of the 144 parents and 96 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires.