

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



5 February 2018

Mrs Ann Kingman
Headteacher
The Weston Road Academy
Blackheath Lane
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST18 0YG

Dear Mrs Kingman

Short inspection of The Weston Road Academy

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with Sarah Godden, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following the previous inspection, standards of achievement dipped. They have now recovered and pupils make good progress by the end of Year 11.

The school has recently experienced two changes of headteacher and you have been in post since June 2017. Several members of your senior leadership team have been in their current role only since September 2017. Despite these recent changes, you have successfully maintained the school's trajectory of improvement and your leadership commands the confidence of pupils, parents and staff. Almost all staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire and the great majority of parents and carers who completed Parent View said that the school is well led and managed. A typical parent comment was, 'I think the school is well run, organised and puts its pupils first. My child has thrived since joining Weston Road both educationally and emotionally.'

You know the school well, including its strengths and areas that need to improve. Effectively supported by senior leaders and governors, you have put in place clear plans to address weaknesses. Improvement is evident in several areas, including attendance and the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with ensuring that teachers consistently plan work of the right level of difficulty so that pupils are appropriately challenged. This remains an area where there is more work to be done. Although

teaching is effective in almost all subjects, levels of challenge are still not consistently high, especially for the most able pupils.

Leaders were also asked to develop the partnership between school and home. This area has been addressed well. Your staff have worked hard to support parents who need additional support. You seek parents' views through an annual survey and seek to act upon their concerns. You have recently established a Parents' Forum, which has been welcomed by parents. Parents are supportive of the school. Several who responded to Parent View commented on the approachability of staff. One summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'Staff are always happy to discuss any concerns and are always prompt to respond, which is much appreciated.'

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding and care for pupils is evident in the school. Inspectors spoke with many pupils during the inspection. Almost all said that they feel safe in school. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and most pupils believe that any that does happen is dealt with well. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their children feel safe and are well cared for in school.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained and consequently alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help. They refer any concerns they have about pupils, secure in the knowledge that they will be dealt with appropriately. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said they believe that pupils are safe in school.

You ensure that procedures to recruit staff safely are well understood and followed carefully. Pre-employment checks on new members of staff are carried out correctly and recorded in detail on the school's single central record and in personnel files.

Inspection findings

- The inspection's first focus area was the level of challenge provided by teaching across the school. Teaching is effective in most subjects. Consequently, pupils make progress that is similar to that made by other pupils nationally with the same starting points. Much teaching is well planned and provides appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of different abilities. Teachers increasingly use questions well to draw out more detailed responses from pupils, so deepening their understanding of their work. Most pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They are keen to do well; they work hard and tackle work with determination.
- However, sometimes there is not enough challenge, especially for the most able pupils. Some teaching does not take into account what pupils already understand, know and can do. When this is the case, work is too easy and pupils make less progress than they could.
- The second area that inspectors considered was the school's actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Prior to 2017, disadvantaged pupils made

much slower progress than others in the school and nationally. Leaders have made improving these pupils' progress a top priority and have employed a number of strategies. Disadvantaged pupils receive one-to-one mentoring. Teachers are now more aware of these pupils' needs and they are increasingly using this information when planning lessons. Staff have worked hard to support parents who need some extra help, for example because their children do not attend school regularly. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at the end of Year 11 in 2017 were much improved because of these actions. Although only a small number of pupils from this cohort were known to be disadvantaged, they made better progress than that seen nationally from other pupils with similar starting points.

- The third focus area was the school's 16 to 19 study programmes. Students consistently make good progress on A-level courses in almost all subjects. Levels of challenge are high and teaching is a little stronger than in the main school. Students are confident and articulate and they enjoy being in the sixth form. They take part in a variety of activities beyond their studies, including work experience and volunteering. However, some aspects of non-qualification activities could be better planned at the outset of a student's time in the sixth form to better match their career aspirations. All requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are in place.
- The next area that inspectors considered was leaders' actions to improve attendance. In recent years, attendance has been a little lower than the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of some groups of vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, has been a cause for concern. Leaders have introduced a number of initiatives this year to improve attendance. The school now has an attendance officer who carefully follows up absences, arranging home visits to speak with parents where appropriate. Staff provide additional support for poor attenders and their parents. High rates of attendance are encouraged and celebrated through rewards presented each term. Attendance has risen this year to be a little higher than the previous year's national average as a consequence of these strategies. The attendance of vulnerable groups of pupils has risen considerably.
- The inspection's final focus area was pupils' behaviour and came about when several pupils shared with inspectors concerns about behaviour in some lessons and at social times. Inspectors visited many lessons during the inspection and observed almost no inappropriate behaviour. The overwhelming majority of pupils were observed to be well behaved, hard working and keen to succeed. Almost all staff who completed the inspection questionnaire and the great majority of parents who completed Parent View agreed that behaviour is good in school. However, during lunchtime, inspectors observed boisterous and inappropriate behaviour from some pupils. Although most pupils behave sensibly and maturely, a minority of pupils do not manage their own behaviour well when not directly supervised by staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently provide high levels of challenge in lessons, especially for the most able pupils
- the behaviour of the minority of pupils who do not currently manage their own behaviour well, improves at lunchtimes.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other members of your senior leadership team. We visited several classes with senior leaders, during which we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. We scrutinised several documents, including your school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, and safeguarding and child protection records. Parents' views were considered through the 94 responses to Parent View, including the 53 free-text comments and a telephone conversation with a parent. We also considered the 56 responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire.