

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Anthony Walker
Headteacher
Pakefield School
London Road
Pakefield
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR33 7AQ

Dear Mr Walker

Short inspection of Pakefield School

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2018 with Nick Asker, 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 March 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been significant changes in leadership and governance over the past two years, including your appointment as headteacher. You now have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and its weaknesses and you have worked effectively with the local authority to ensure that your judgements about the school's performance are accurate.

Pupils' overall progress has declined in recent years. Although you have now identified what needs to be done, many of the actions that leaders are undertaking are at a very early stage. As a consequence, it is too soon to be able to see the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' progress. While your improvement plans are focused on appropriate priorities, you acknowledge that they lack rigour and that they do not provide governors with sufficient information with which to hold leaders to account robustly.

You have made some progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the school's last inspection. Leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that the most able pupils make greater progress. You have ensured that

this has been a priority for teachers at Pakefield. Most-able pupils' overall progress improved significantly in the 2017 GCSE examinations as a result of initiatives that you implemented such as the 'challenge project'. Improvements in the progress of most-able pupils currently attending the school are also evident.

Your actions to improve the impact of leaders' observations of lessons have not been successful. Leaders' approaches to evaluating the quality of teaching have been overly generous for some time. As a consequence, your work in this area has not been sufficiently robust and its impact has been inconsistent. You have recently made changes to the leadership of teaching and, with the support of the local authority, your evaluations are now more realistic. You acknowledge that improvements in this area, while underway, are at an early stage.

You have a clear vision for the school's development and you have recently made changes to staffing structures and to the curriculum that will support your plans. Middle leaders and recently qualified staff are grateful for the support and training they receive. You are aware that some of the changes that you have introduced have been unpopular with some parents and you are keen to improve communication between leaders and the school community.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff and these records are scrutinised on a regular basis by a nominated member of the governing body. Staff are well trained and they know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk. Staff understand the school's systems for reporting concerns and they feel that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept and any child protection referrals are monitored robustly.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe through assemblies and tutorial sessions that cover topics such as e-safety, bullying and travelling to and from school. They welcome the high levels of staff presence throughout the school day and they do not feel that there are any 'no-go' areas on the school site. While pupils know who to talk to if they have any concerns, they do feel that, at times, instances of bullying could be dealt with more effectively.

Inspection findings

- I pursued a number of lines of enquiry throughout the inspection. My first question related to the dip in progress seen in the 2017 GCSE results and how you are responding to this. You are clear that leaders' assessment of pupils' performance in 2017 was not accurate and that the process for judging the overall quality of teaching was also overly optimistic. As a consequence, the quality of teaching across the school is currently still too inconsistent. Where teaching is of a high quality, pupils are making good progress. However, in too

many lessons pupils are not making good progress because teachers are not challenging them to improve the quality of their work. Governors have not been able to hold leaders to account effectively about pupils' progress because the information that they have been provided with has been unrealistic.

- Leaders now have a much more accurate understanding of both pupils' performance and the quality of teaching as a result of the changes to leadership that you have recently introduced. However, your plans to improve the quality of teaching are currently being implemented and it is too early to judge their long-term impact.
- A second line of enquiry related to the progress, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have reviewed their approaches to the spending of the pupil premium grant. Through the development of the 'minimum guarantee', they are now implementing a range of strategies that are effective in improving pupils' outcomes. Pupils in Year 11 are making much more progress overall than the previous cohort, though this is still below average. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is also beginning to improve in other year groups.
- Leaders' actions to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions and the absence rates of disadvantaged pupils are not as effective. Disadvantaged pupils' absence is still above average, and the number of disadvantaged pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions is well above average.
- I was keen to establish the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' behaviour because, over recent years, the proportion of pupils receiving fixed-term exclusions has been above average. Leaders have recently provided staff and pupils with greater clarity regarding expectations of pupils' behaviour and they have put new systems in place for managing behaviour. These changes are welcomed by pupils. However, changes to school systems, and the creation of the 'standards team', are not yet fully embedded. Teachers do not consistently manage behaviour well during lessons. As a consequence, the number of fixed-term exclusions remains above average and pupils commented on the disproportionate impact that a minority of pupils have on their learning.
- Finally, I wanted to check the extent to which leaders are improving the progress of pupils who enter the school with low prior attainment. The progress of this group of pupils is inconsistent. Too often, pupils are not challenged because teachers' planning does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. Progress for this cohort is below average. Low prior-attaining pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well supported in lessons and individual case studies provide examples of these pupils making strong progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school development planning is robust and allows governors to hold leaders to account

- they improve pupils' progress by ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is consistently good and that adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
- they ensure that teachers manage behaviour consistently and in line with their expectations
- they reduce the difference between the progress, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally
- they seek and consider parents' and carers' views, strengthening the school's partnership with parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Gee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, leaders, other school staff, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and groups of pupils. Together with you and other leaders, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. We reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. We also considered the 193 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, from parents, and 43 responses from staff.