

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



28 February 2018

Mr James McDonald
Headteacher
New Heights High School
Naylorfield Drive
Netherley
Liverpool
Merseyside
L27 1XY

Dear Mr McDonald

Short inspection of New Heights High School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018 with Lisa Morgan, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are now in your third year as headteacher. Since joining the school, you have worked alongside other new senior leaders to inject energy, enthusiasm and a strong sense of moral purpose. This has ensured that all staff share an unswerving commitment to providing pupils with the intensive personalised support that is required for them to successfully access appropriate provision in the future.

The local authority greatly values the important strategic role the school plays in supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils across the city. It acknowledges the pivotal role that you play in improving the support for pupils who are permanently excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion. You have challenged the local authority and other headteachers to better support these pupils. Furthermore, you have demonstrated a total commitment to being part of the local authority's solution for supporting the increasing number of pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion.

You moved the school into a new state-of-the-art building at the start of this month. You have continued to offer education at the original site in Netherley. You have a clear rationale for how each site is used: the new site in Fazakerley educates the majority of pupils and aims to reintegrate pupils into mainstream school in a short period of time; the original site educates a small number of pupils who require a slightly longer period of support before transferring to a suitable destination. You have skilfully managed the movement to a second site. You have built capacity

among the senior leadership team to effectively manage a larger and more diverse provision.

Pupils are enormously grateful for the support they receive. All pupils spoken to said they prefer attending New Heights to their previous school. Pupils buy into the school's aims and all are keen to re-join an appropriate school in the future. Pupils are particularly appreciative of the relationships they enjoy with staff. Typical comments from pupils include: 'The staff know how to talk to you and are really on your level,' and 'The staff have taught me that it's not just my world and I have to think about other people.' The staff appreciate being part of a close-knit community. They relish seeing pupils make 'breakthrough moments'. They do not underestimate the important role they play in providing vulnerable young people with a crucial second chance at education.

You and your team have maintained many of the school's strengths that were highlighted during the previous inspection. For example, relationships remain the cornerstone of the school's work, and pupils continue to quickly demonstrate a readiness to return to a mainstream school or an appropriate specialist setting. You have strong systems in place for managing the school. For example, your systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching are well developed. Furthermore, your systems to appraise the performance of staff ensure that all staff contribute to moving the school forward and are held to account for the progress made by pupils.

Leaders have effectively addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have strengthened the school's systems for supporting pupils to attend regularly. The large majority of pupils join the school after a period of sporadic attendance. You presented information that shows that attendance has improved over the last three years. You could also demonstrate that the majority of pupils improve their attendance when at the school. Positively, pupils' attendance generally improves the longer they have been at New Heights. At the moment, you do not have any pupils who have refused to attend.

You have also greatly enhanced the way that teaching assistants support pupils. Teaching assistants are now assigned to subjects, rather than being linked to particular classes. As a result, they work closely with teachers to plan and evaluate learning. Observations confirmed that teaching assistants provide highly effective support in lessons. They question pupils well and have strong subject knowledge.

You have developed assessment procedures so that pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn in lessons. Your systems for assessing pupils on entry to the school are effective. This assessment leads to the generation of specific targets for pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at providing pupils with work that enables them to achieve both general objectives and subject-specific targets. This work has ensured that teaching is closely focused on helping pupils to make small but significant gains in their learning.

Your understanding of the school's effectiveness is balanced and perceptive. You have high expectations for the school and are keen for it to keep improving. You are aware, for example, that pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in English. Furthermore, you appreciate that you do not currently track the progress of different groups of pupils with similar starting points. You are also aware that a slightly lower proportion of pupils have successfully transferred to other schools during the current academic year and you are keen to address the issues that have led to this reduction.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a culture in which every member of staff takes their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. Staff fully understand that they are responsible for looking after highly vulnerable pupils. Through detailed investigative work, leaders develop a strong understanding of the safeguarding risks that are particularly high for each pupil. Leaders share this information clearly and appropriately with staff to enable all staff to work with pupils to reduce these risks. Staff use their regular training to support pupils effectively.

Staff are extremely vigilant to changes in pupils' mood or behaviour. All pupils complete a short questionnaire at the start of each day that asks them about how they have slept, what they have eaten for breakfast and how they feel. This information is then analysed to prioritise which pupils need additional help during the day. Staff are conscientious in communicating any safeguarding concerns to leaders. As a result, pupils benefit from excellent care and attention. The school's approach to working with a range of different agencies is exemplary and plays a key role in reducing risk over time.

Leaders have ensured that a relentless focus is maintained on providing pupils with the skills, knowledge and understanding to manage risks to themselves. For example, daily lessons in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) focus on topics such as knife crime, drugs and fire safety. Pupils also benefit from regular sessions that are run by the Brook Advisory Centre on healthy relationships. As a result, pupils leave the school with a much clearer understanding of how to manage different risks.

Above all else, staff care for pupils exceptionally well. They go above and beyond what is typically expected to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. For example, they are often in contact with parents and carers over weekends to make sure that their children are safe and well. Leaders have also ensured that all safeguarding records are precise and fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at how much progress pupils make. The majority of pupils join the school with skills in English and mathematics that are typically well below their chronological age. Furthermore, many pupils have stopped making academic

progress in the months or years prior to joining New Heights. However, due to effective teaching and a carefully crafted curriculum, pupils make fast progress, particularly in literacy. Some pupils make rapid progress as they re-engage with learning and take great enjoyment out of making up for lost time. Disadvantaged pupils make progress that is at least as fast as that of other pupils nationally. As a result, there are clear signs that pupils start the long process of catching up with their peers.

- Leaders carefully track pupils' progress across the curriculum. They can show, for example, that pupils make particularly strong progress in physical education and art. Leaders are also beginning to embed effective systems for tracking pupils' social and emotional development.
- During the last academic year, 97% of pupils successfully transferred to a suitable destination. The comparative figures for the current academic year are a little lower. This, in part, is because not all schools across the authority are proactive in their approach to supporting pupils to reintegrate into mainstream education. To address this issue, you have recently appointed a new senior leader to lead on supporting pupils and schools to rehabilitate pupils more effectively into mainstream education.
- Leaders are not tracking the progress of groups of pupils with similar starting points. As a result, you have only a limited understanding of how effective teaching is in different subjects for pupils of low, middle and high prior attainment.
- A second line of enquiry focused on how effectively the curriculum helps pupils to re-connect with learning. You have a clear rationale for the design of the curriculum. It is broad and balanced, with an academic core designed to mirror pupils' experiences in mainstream education. As such, it aids progression and continuity and prevents pupils from becoming conditioned to a different and alternative educational culture. The focus on the rapid development of literacy skills helps pupils to access the wider curriculum and makes a marked contribution to improving their confidence and self-esteem.
- Leaders also take great care to ensure that the curriculum in each subject engages pupils. For example, the humanities curriculum carefully links different topics that pupils find fascinating, such as Jack the Ripper, the Hillsborough tragedy and child labour. You regularly evaluate the curriculum and make modifications to suit different pupils. You have identified, for example, that the curriculum for the Netherley site requires development to ensure that pupils who stay at the school for longer than the expected 16-weeks period continue to make fast progress in their learning.
- The formal curriculum is well supported by a range of extra-curricular activities such as football, basketball, table tennis, cooking and art. Leaders' records indicate that the majority of pupils regularly take part in at least one extra-curricular activity.
- Finally, we looked at how effectively teaching meets pupils' needs. The teaching of literacy across the school is a key strength. All staff consider themselves teachers of literacy. Teachers share high expectations of pupils' extended writing

and vocabulary. There are effective systems for developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar.

- Pupils take pride in their work and are keen to do well. They present their work neatly and generally concentrate well in lessons. Teachers and other adults effectively personalise lessons through individual support and skilful questioning. Pupils are responsive to staff's high expectations of their behaviour most of the time. Inspectors found teaching at the two sites to be equally strong.
- The teaching of mathematics has been less effective over time. Your efforts to improve teaching in this area have been hampered by difficulties in recruiting teachers of mathematics. The development of numeracy across the curriculum has not been a focus. As a result, there is a clear disparity between the progress pupils make in mathematics and that in English. Much of the work that pupils complete in mathematics is too easy. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do in mathematics are not as high as they are in other subjects. As a result, pupils do not routinely approach mathematics with the same positive attitudes to learning as they do other areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are supported to make faster progress in mathematics by improving teaching in this area and implementing a coherent strategy to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum
- the progress of groups of pupils with similar starting points, such as the most able, are carefully tracked to provide clear insights into the effectiveness of teaching for different groups within mixed-ability classes
- leaders continue to strengthen their strategic work with other schools and the local authority so that even more pupils are successful in their reintegration to mainstream schools or in their transition to specialist provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. We also met with members of the governing body. We spoke with the school's improvement partner and a representative from the local

authority. We met formally with groups of pupils and talked informally with others around the school. We met formally with groups of staff, which included teachers and teaching assistants from both the Fazakerley and Netherley sites.

You accompanied us on visits to classes, where we observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects. We observed teaching and learning at both sites. We also looked at work produced by pupils throughout the school in English, mathematics and humanities.

We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. We also scrutinised a range of policies, the school improvement plan and self-evaluation report. Inspectors also looked at the school's website.

Inspectors considered one comment received by Ofsted's free-text facility. There were not enough responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, to be significant. There was no response to either the staff or pupil questionnaire.