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Mr Gary Schlick
Headteacher
Bedminster Down School
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Dear Mr Schlick

Short inspection of Bedminster Down School

Following my visit to the school on 11 April 2018 with Mark Thompson, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have recruited a number of new teachers, particularly in mathematics, as well as middle and senior leaders. These appointments have strengthened the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Additionally, new trustees (governors) bring significant experience and expertise, which is increasingly holding leaders to account.

You have successfully embraced the areas for improvement at the previous inspection. The introduction of 'assess, plan, teach' has increased the rigour of teachers' planning of learning and their assessment. This is ensuring that pupils are clearer about what they need to do to improve their work. Working with other local schools, teachers are increasingly confident in the accuracy of their assessments of what pupils know, understand and can do.

Raising aspirations has been a clear theme in recent years. Pupils are increasingly aware of the range of opportunities that are available to them in both their personal and social development and also the options open to them when they leave school.

The school is a calm and orderly environment. In classes, pupils are ready to learn and routines clearly in place. Pupils and staff report that behaviour is significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils remark that lesson times are now much more productive and as a result they are making more rapid

progress. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and are making good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding carry out their responsibilities diligently. They ensure that every member of staff is suitably trained in child protection, including particular issues that are pertinent to the school, for example in domestic violence. As a result, staff are quick to spot when pupils are distressed and potentially at risk of harm.

Leaders are swift to involve other agencies, such as children's social care, when necessary and appropriate. They are clear about the procedures for referring cases to the local authority and use the escalation policy effectively when they are not satisfied that pupils are being adequately protected. Your staff often go beyond the expectations of school staff to help families when they need support.

The necessary checks are carried out on potential members of staff before they take up employment. However, the recording of these checks is not rigorous enough and some of the checks cannot be evidenced. Staff are aware of this and have started to strengthen these checks but there is more to do.

Inspection findings

- You are acutely aware that the proportion of pupils completing the range of qualifications to achieve the English Baccalaureate has been low. This potentially places pupils, particularly the most able, at a disadvantage. You also recognise that boys have not achieved as highly as girls.
- You and your leadership team are fully committed to reforming the range and breadth of the curriculum. You have made some significant strides in this. Leaders and teachers have raised pupils' expectations and organised high-quality careers guidance. Consequently, an increasing proportion of pupils now follow subjects which will qualify for the English Baccalaureate, including modern languages. However, this figure remains below the level seen typically nationally. Furthermore, pupils lack the breadth of knowledge that they need to be secure in their understanding and able to apply their knowledge in other scenarios. Your leaders are working on raising this further but the school's work with parents and the local community has not yet been successfully embraced.
- New courses, including vocational qualifications in health and fitness and food and cookery, are engaging pupils in adopting a healthy lifestyle. Beyond the taught curriculum, a significant number of pupils are engaged in extra-curricular opportunities. The 'Challenge24' programme, for all pupils in Year 9, is building pupils' range of experience and personal development.
- Boys' attainment is increasing and as a result the gap between boys and girls is reducing. Inspection evidence shows that there are no significant differences in boys' attitudes to learning although some lack the confidence to fully contribute in learning.

- For several years, disadvantaged pupils have not attended school as often or achieved as well as their classmates and other pupils nationally. You have ensured that members of staff are aware of the individual needs of these pupils and have invested additional funding in a range of strategies. The employment of additional teaching staff, known as student progress supporters, is effective in guiding and challenging disadvantaged pupils to think more deeply. They also work with other pupils, giving the class teacher time to work on a one-to-one or small-group basis to improve pupils' understanding. Leaders' analysis is rightly prioritising this group and interventions are swift. Some of these interventions are designed to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. These have had some positive impact but not significantly so.
- The Lamp, your off-site unit for pupils who are at risk of exclusion from school, is particularly effective in improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The individualised programmes, which also include work experience, personal development and safety education, ensure that these pupils are well prepared for their next steps. Many, particularly younger pupils, reintegrate into the main school successfully. All Year 11 pupils have secured places at local further education colleges.
- As a result of the school's actions, disadvantaged pupils are achieving more highly. In some subjects, particularly at key stage 3, disadvantaged pupils are achieving as well as their classmates. However, disadvantaged pupils at Bedminster Down School still do not attend school as often or achieve as highly overall as their classmates and other pupils nationally.
- Published information shows a higher level of exclusions than seen typically. Exclusions hit a high in 2016/17 following the introduction of a clear set of high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Many pupils initially found it difficult to meet these. However, pupils have risen to these higher expectations. As a result, the vast majority of pupils behave well. In lessons, they are attentive and show good attitudes towards their learning. Interactions between staff and pupils and between pupils are highly positive. Lesson time is no longer regularly lost as a result of poor behaviour. As these higher expectations have become embedded, the need for exclusions has fallen significantly and is now in line with levels seen typically nationally.
- Pupils' attendance has been below the national average for the last three academic years. Persistent absenteeism (pupils with attendance lower than 90%) has risen and is significantly higher than levels seen typically nationally. Trustees have invested heavily in strategies to improve pupils' attendance. These have had very limited success. In the first two terms of the current academic year, attendance has improved slightly but is still well below the rate seen typically nationally. Leaders are aware that work to stress the importance of regular attendance with parents and carers is at an early stage and more is required.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they engage parents and carers more in their children's learning to ensure that their children attend school on a regular basis
- disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress, particularly in key stage 4, to ensure that they achieve as well as other pupils nationally
- pre-employment checks are fully and accurately recorded and those records are carefully maintained.

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 the City of Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we observed learning in classrooms and reviewed pupils' work. We were accompanied by senior leaders in these activities. We spoke with pupils in lessons and at social times. Meetings were held with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and two governors. One of us visited the school's off-site provision, The Lamp.

We scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, behaviour and attendance analyses, assessment information and safeguarding records. I considered the views of 128 parents who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires of 126 pupils and 59 members of staff.