

26 April 2018

Mrs Sian Graham
Headteacher
West Derby School
364 West Derby Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L13 7HQ

Dear Mrs Graham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Derby School

Following my visit to your school on 17 April 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' progress and achievement in humanities
- continue to improve teaching and learning so that they are consistently good within and across departments
- continue improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, by building on the considerable recent improvements in attendance and the reduction of persistent absence.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a representative of the governing body, a school improvement partner and pupils. During these meetings, I discussed the actions taken since the last inspection and their impact. I visited several classrooms jointly with senior leaders to observe teaching and learning. I considered the school improvement plan and a range of documents relating to school improvement, including minutes of governors' meetings. I also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes. Leadership roles have been redesigned, two members of the leadership team have left and three staff have been appointed to the team. Three new roles of attendance mentors have been created. Three members of staff have started at the school, including a new middle leader. A number of staff have left the school and the leadership of some departments has changed.

Main findings

Leaders, governors and staff are committed to bringing about swift improvements for the benefit of all pupils. The headteacher leads with compassion and moral purpose. Leaders have a clear focus on progress and quality of provision at all levels. Senior leaders know pupils well and are resolute in their efforts to ensure that all pupils at West Derby School benefit from the highest quality of education. Leaders and governors have an honest and accurate view of the school's progress towards becoming good. They are aware of the successes achieved so far and the areas which still require improvement.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have taken decisive action to improve the attendance of pupils. Under new leadership, the attendance strategy has been redesigned and now has a high profile across the school. Leaders use rewards and sanctions creatively and all staff contribute to raising attendance, from support staff and form tutors to pastoral leaders. Pupils commented that they enjoy the rewards on offer and now encourage their peers to attend more regularly.

As a result of this new, focused approach, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving towards national averages. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has fallen considerably and is now in line with the national average. Parents are informed regularly about their children's attendance. Leaders work tirelessly to develop positive relationships with families to support them in getting their children into school. Leaders do not shy away from holding challenging conversations with parents and pupils when they do not fully appreciate the detrimental effect that missing valuable learning has on pupils' qualifications, well-being and life chances.

Despite these actions, the attendance of a small number of pupils is not improving as rapidly as that of others. Leaders are determined to build upon the momentum they have created across the school to continue the focus on the pupils whose attendance remains stubbornly low.

The work done to improve the outcomes of sixth-form students studying academic courses has paid dividends. The progress of students in the sixth form has improved considerably, so that the vast majority of A-level students now make better progress than their peers nationally across a range of subjects. Leadership of the sixth form is strong. Leaders have made the quality assurance of all aspects of provision more rigorous. They now ensure that subject leaders are held to account for standards and achievement. As a result, improvements are clearly evident in attendance, in retention of students and in academic outcomes. Projected numbers for admission to the sixth form are positive indicators for the future.

Since the previous inspection, teaching and learning have remained 'high profile' across the school, as leaders are adamant that high-quality teaching and learning are the key to improvements in all areas of school life. The climate for learning around the school is positive. Pupils' positive attitudes are indicative of the positive relationships and the mutual respect which exists between pupils and staff. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they enjoy lessons and feel that they make good progress in a wide variety of subjects. The ethos around the school reflects the school's new approach to support, where pupils are supported by 'challenging them to do better'.

Leaders at all levels work together to ensure good-quality teaching and learning. They do this through systematically checking the quality of learning in lessons, scrutinising assessment information and pupils' work, and by incorporating the views of pupils. Effective training on whole-school strategies and opportunities for more bespoke support ensure that teachers are well equipped to provide learning opportunities which accurately meet the needs of pupils.

As a result of detailed quality assurance processes, leaders have an in-depth knowledge of the strengths of teaching and learning. This enables them to put plans in place promptly to address any weaknesses or variability in teaching and learning. Bespoke activities, ranging from support plans to individualised training, continue to improve teaching. When teaching fails to promote good progress for pupils, leaders take swift action to support staff and departments appropriately.

Leaders have produced thorough plans to improve the school further. These plans have progress at their core and identify how each action will have an impact on the achievement of pupils. Leaders and governors have acknowledged and acted upon the issues identified in the previous inspection report. They have faced the challenges in improving outcomes, attendance and pupils' progress and have addressed them with determination and purpose. The school improvement plan supports leaders in their actions as it is clear and appropriate.

Governors are knowledgeable and experienced. They are able to support the headteacher and leadership team in making improvements across the school. Governors understand the key areas of strength of the school and what the school still needs to do to improve further. They have undertaken recent training in many areas, including pupil premium funding, the 'Prevent' duty and safer recruitment. Governors ask challenging questions of leaders and check leaders' progress against the accurate and detailed plans for improvement.

The headteacher is resolute in her ambition to bring about rapid yet sustainable improvements. Leaders and governors are beginning to see the impact of their efforts in many ways, but are acutely aware of the challenges which remain. The headteacher is ably supported by the senior leadership team. Together they form a cohesive team who demonstrate the capacity needed to continue the school's journey of improvement towards becoming a good school.

External support

Leaders and governors have secured strong support from a school improvement partner, commissioned from the local authority. Governors and leaders have also brokered support from experienced, external consultants. Leaders also have excellent links with other local schools, with whom they share training opportunities and work collaboratively.

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

Helen O'Neill
Her Majesty's Inspector