

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



11 June 2018

Mr Michael Gunston
Headteacher
The John of Gaunt School
Wingfield Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 9EH

Dear Mr Gunston

Short inspection of The John of Gaunt School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Jonathan Jones and Gillian Hickling, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 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 lead a highly inclusive school which benefits pupils and the local community. You and your team are committed to the success of every pupil and the school's ethos is supportive and caring. The following parental comment is typical of many: 'All staff are very caring, and we have always felt that they have fantastic working relationships with pupils and parents.'

You and your leadership team evaluate the school's work honestly and accurately. This is also true of the governing body. Governors are highly skilled and committed to the continuing improvement of the school. They work as a team and hold you and your colleagues to account with rigour and professionalism.

The priorities set for further development are well chosen. Your willingness to respond to criticism and your carefully considered plans for the future have created a positive and open culture in the school. You therefore have the strong support of colleagues. You are fully aware of areas of weakness and clear about what needs to be done to bring about the necessary improvements. For example, you shared inspectors' judgements that the performance of disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment needs to improve. You are also committed to improving attendance and reducing persistent absence still further.

Since the last inspection, you have maintained a strong focus on the quality of teaching. The development and training of staff have been a priority for you and your team, and

this has had an impact on the progress made by pupils across the school. Middle leaders are now more accountable for their actions and they have responded well to changes aimed at driving up standards. For example, the recent introduction of 'Talk for Writing' has been well received, and its impact was evident in lessons visited by inspectors.

Students make good progress in the sixth form and appreciate the support they are given by their teachers. Despite its relatively small size, the sixth form offers a broad range of subjects and a wide range of enrichment opportunities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are accurate. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are well trained and understand the risks pupils face, including sexual exploitation and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Pupils say that they feel safe at school.

The school's commitment to safeguarding is demonstrated by the fact that it has developed a secure online record-keeping system which is being used by many schools in the local area. It is a comprehensive package which enables staff to identify issues quickly and to spot trends in pupils' behaviour.

Governors have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and they attend regular training sessions. They work alongside the leadership team to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors agreed several lines of enquiry with you at the start of the inspection. The first of these focused on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment. Pupils' progress overall was broadly average in 2017 but the progress of disadvantaged and low prior attaining pupils was significantly below average. You and your team are fully aware of this and a number of significant improvements are now in place. The school's tracking systems indicate that pupils are currently making faster progress. This is particularly evident in Year 10, where progress measures for both disadvantaged and low prior attaining pupils are expected to be in line with national averages by the end of the year. You acknowledge, however, that there is further work to do.
- Pupils achieve well in English. Inspectors saw evidence of good progress in books. 'Talk for Writing' has recently been introduced and is having a strong impact. The department's focus on redrafting is working well across the ability range and enables weaker pupils to learn more effectively.
- In 2017, results in GCSE mathematics were disappointing and not as strong as in previous years. Steps have been taken to provide additional support and teachers are confident that pupils are better prepared for the demands of the new examination specifications. Work seen by inspectors in lessons confirms this view.
- Progress in science is less secure as a result of the turbulence in staffing in the department in recent years. A new team is now in place and the school is confident

that standards are set to rise. There is now a regular focus on practical activities to engage pupils in their learning and a thorough and supportive revision programme is in place for pupils in Year 11.

- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is improving, particularly in the lower school, where new systems are in place to support pupils in the classroom. A new reward system has recently been introduced and this is helping to encourage and inspire them. The Year 7 catch-up programme is very effective.
- The second line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all pupils. A number of changes have been introduced in recent years and these are now proving to be successful. The two-year key stage 3 curriculum works well. It is built around 'learning cycles' with regular assessments to check pupil progress. At the end of every learning cycle, teachers check learning using the 'GEM' model – Gaps, Embedding, Mastery – and this is now being used increasingly widely across the school.
- A transition group has been introduced into Years 7 and 8 and this is helping to enable vulnerable pupils to make faster progress and to integrate more effectively into the school. Pupils in this group are taught English and mathematics by one teacher, following a primary school model. They join mainstream classes for all other subjects.
- The curriculum is now responsive to the needs of pupils at all levels. Key stage 3 pupils are being equipped with the skills they need to access the new GCSE specifications. At key stage 4, the choice of GCSE courses is tailored to the needs of individual pupils. Alternative provision is used for a small number of disengaged students at Include, the off-site provision for pupils in danger of permanent exclusion managed by a group of local secondary schools. You also work with Wiltshire College and Larkrise Farm. This provision is monitored closely by the school and its effectiveness evaluated regularly.
- Sixth-form students have a good choice of A levels and easy access to a wide range of other courses at nearby schools and colleges. Efforts are made to ensure that all needs are met. For example, the school collaborates with Clarendon Academy to offer a greater choice of A-level subjects. Students have good access to independent advice and guidance, and they are very positive about the support they receive.
- Inspectors also considered the effectiveness of school leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching. A robust and effective system is in place and this has helped to improve accountability at all levels. However, there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Leaders are aware of this and work hard to support less effective staff and share good practice across the school.
- The school makes good use of external advisers and welcomes objective criticism. This has enabled changes to be made and a culture of complacency to be avoided. Judgements are carefully moderated and teaching strategies regularly shared with other schools.
- Leaders acknowledge that further progress is needed to improve attendance and to reduce persistent absence. In recent years, attendance figures have been below national averages and persistent absence well above. Attendance overall has improved this year but the figures for disadvantaged pupils remain stubbornly low.

There is evidence, however, that interventions are having an impact in Years 7 and 8. A wide range of improvement strategies are now being employed. For example, an attendance officer has been appointed and greater use is being made of attendance notices. All absent pupils now receive a return to school interview and daily absences are monitored very closely.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all groups of pupils attend regularly and that persistent absence is rare
- teachers build on existing good practice to secure consistently good progress for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment
- the quality of teaching across the school is consistently good.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Steward
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you and your senior team, middle leaders, and members of the governing body.

We talked to pupils, both formally in groups and informally around the school. We visited lessons with you and your team to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding, attendance and the use of pupil premium funding.

Inspectors took account of 69 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 66 written comments from parents. We also looked at the 132 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 107 responses to the staff questionnaire.