

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



26 June 2018

Mrs Vallance
Headteacher
Leighton Middle School
Church Square
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire
LU7 1EX

Dear Mrs Vallance

Short inspection of Leighton Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 8 June 2018 with Shân Oswald, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your senior leaders have high expectations of staff. Leaders have created a nurturing culture where pupils are encouraged to excel academically and in a range of social and sporting activities. Strategies implemented to raise pupil attendance have been successful since your previous inspection. Attendance for all pupils is now above the national average.

You and your leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. You have implemented robust programmes for developing staff and monitoring lessons, which has led to a positive increase in the quality of lessons. You and your leaders are supported by a committed and able governing body that shares your aspirations for the school.

Pupils are very happy at school. They cooperate well during lessons and are courteous to each other and adults. Pupils understand that staff have high expectations of them. You ensure that pupils follow a broad curriculum, including opportunities to study French weekly in key stage 2. Pupils told us that the lessons are interesting; for example, Year 5 pupils were analysing public census data and deciding for themselves whether they could trust the findings.

You and your senior leaders have the overwhelming support of parents and carers, many of whom praise the care and academic support their children receive. However, a number of parents did raise concern via the Ofsted online survey that communication between school and home could be better.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors have ensured that the school has effective procedures which keep pupils safe and well looked after. Records are kept accurately and staff are diligent in referring their concerns to leaders. Every child is well known and nothing is taken as insignificant. Staff are mindful of pupils' physical and mental well-being. It is impressive that 25 members of staff are voluntarily studying a course in pupil mental health.

Pupils said that they feel safe. They know how to keep themselves safe online and how to minimise risks in social situations. Pupils said that bullying is not common in school and staff deal with it quickly when it does arise.

The school uses personal, social, health and economic education to teach pupils about their roles as citizens and how they should keep each other safe. Pupils told us that they are taught about diversity and British values and how this is important for their lives outside of school.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry focused on how staff ensure that pupils who have a disadvantaged background perform as well as they can. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils performed better in key stage 2 national tests than in the previous year. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that pupil progress is tracked carefully and support is given quickly. Programmes such as 'mind the gap' ensure that pupils who have not performed as well as they could are given extra support in smaller classes before moving fully into core subjects at key stage 3. We found that leaders need to better evaluate the impact of whole-school support strategies, so they can be sure what is effective and what makes a difference to pupils' performance.
- There is a wide range of strategies addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils. The 'little and often' method used during tutor time for mathematics and English helps pupils to build their skills and confidence. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics still needs to improve, as too many of them are not reaching the higher standards in national tests.
- My second line of enquiry centred on how well leaders ensure that the curriculum and teaching in key stage 3 enable pupils to make as much progress as possible. The curriculum is well taught, and your data for pupil progress in each subject supports this. The curriculum is taught by specialists and there is a culture of high aspirations for pupil achievement. Leaders have invested in specialist rooms and resources to ensure that there is a positive difference between pupils' key stage 2 primary and key stage 3 secondary experiences.
- We saw lessons that were challenging and taught imaginatively. For example, Year 8 pupils were studying civil rights in America, but they approached the work by asking, 'What if a particular event had not occurred?' The level of pupil engagement and

discussion in lessons was notable, and pupils said that they enjoy learning in this way. We found that pupils benefit from the high level of teacher expertise in different subject areas.

- Pupils make very positive progress in key stage 3, and those who underperformed in key stage 2 national tests catch up with their peers. You ensure that the curriculum at key stage 3 is aligned to that taught in the upper schools that pupils will join, and the skills for future GCSEs are taught explicitly.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how effectively leaders manage transition so pupils can build quickly on their learning from earlier years. There is a strong pastoral programme to ensure that pupils settle into school and become part of the Leighton family. Pupils and parents commented on how happy they are with the transition arrangements. You and your leaders are adept at securing accurate data from pupils' previous schools and making sure that you know pupils' strengths and weaknesses quickly. Staff then give appropriate support. This strategy is beginning to have a positive impact, for example in the remarkable progress that boys make in reading.
- Although pupils make strong progress over the whole of their middle school education, the performance in the national tests at key stage 2 is not as good as it could be for some groups, including girls' mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress for all pupils in mathematics continues to improve
- leaders evaluate the impact of the whole-school support strategies, so they are clear how effective their actions are.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Osagie
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we held meetings with you and members of your senior leadership team, middle leaders, the chair of governors and members of the governing body. We met with groups of pupils from key stages 2 and 3. We visited lessons with you and members of your senior leadership team. They considered 137 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, and 304 responses from pupils and 43 responses from staff to their surveys. We reviewed a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation summary, improvement plans and information about pupils' outcomes,

progress and attendance. We reviewed safeguarding documentation and procedures, scrutinised the school's record of checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school, and carried out checks to confirm that the website meets publication requirements.