

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Michael Cater
Headteacher
Wrotham School
Borough Green Road
Wrotham
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN15 7RD

Dear Mr Cater

Short inspection of Wrotham School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 2018 with Pat Slonecki, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The school is increasingly oversubscribed as its well-deserved reputation for 'high expectations, challenge and opportunity' spreads. This reflects your and the previous headteacher's successful work, which both of you have continued in your new roles. Over 90% of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to others. They describe it as 'inspirational', 'supportive', 'fantastically encouraging and nurturing' and with a 'lovely family feel'. Several of them described how teachers and support staff 'go beyond expectations'.

During the inspection, my colleague and I saw stimulating lessons delivered by enthusiastic teachers and supportive teaching assistants. We sensed the mutual atmosphere of respect and tolerance as pupils and students worked hard in lessons. We were impressed by Year 11 pupils' concentration in two English revision sessions. We saw only a small minority of pupils who were not totally absorbed in learning or a bit cheerfully noisy at breaktimes.

You are skilful at spotting emerging talent and encouraging and supporting teachers' professional development. Recently appointed members of your senior leadership team had all been identified as being most effective middle leaders. Their replacements were already identified from equally effective, home-grown staff. You rightly acknowledge that your stable staffing is a considerable asset and that so many work with energy, determination and enthusiasm.

The staff questionnaire responses were hugely supportive of your and the executive headteacher's 'caring' leadership. They also praised your vision, moral purpose, listening culture and consideration of their work/life balance. Pupils and students sense that staff enjoy working at the school, which certainly contributes to the purposeful buzz around the school and the relaxed, happy ambience inspectors experienced.

In 2017, Year 11 pupils attained the highest GCSE results for non-selective schools in Kent. Pupils' progress was very close to that position as well. This confirms how well pupils are now challenged to tackle demanding work. For example, Year 8 pupils use GCSE resources and full equations in science and, in geography, they learn about employment issues in Dubai linked to migration. A lack of consistent challenge was one of the two areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection; this is no longer the case.

The second area for improvement that emerged during the previous inspection has been resolved through strong sixth-form leadership. In 2017, A-level results and progress improved and were closer to the applied (work-related) results. Based on students' starting points, the point scores per entry matched or were above the 2017 national figures for both qualifications in 2017. The value added to students' progress was in the top 10% nationally for applied courses in 2016 and 2017.

Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to be one of the school's many strong features. Staff can quickly access easy-to-read information about pupils' individual needs, such as particular actions or sounds that could upset pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, or details about their talents, in computer skills for example. The special educational needs coordinator makes sure that the transition for Year 7 pupils is as successful as possible. All Year 7 pupils have the opportunity to go on a camping trip, along with school discos, which many pupils enjoyed in primary school.

Safeguarding is effective

Safeguarding was described as outstanding in the previous report and is still similarly strong three years later. You continue to be the designated safeguarding lead which contributes to its high profile. Governors are well informed because the chair of the governing body oversees this important work and feeds back to the full board every term. Staff training is appropriate and their knowledge up to date.

Pupils refer to the school's multi-agency centre (the safeguarding hub) as a haven where they can always find someone to talk to if they have any concerns or worries.

Safeguarding officers, counsellors, mentors and student support officers offer excellent advice and support for all pupils and students. They make referrals to outside agencies for external input whenever needed. They keep a careful eye on all vulnerable pupils or those who are carers at home, children looked after or who suffer from mental health issues.

Pupils and students receive much good advice about how to keep themselves safe and be alert to potentially unsafe situations, particularly online and when texting. Additionally, the school also provides a range of information related to safeguarding which parents and pupils can access easily.

Inspection findings

- In discussion, we explored the reasons behind the school's improvements since the last inspection and I probed whether the few subjects with disappointing GCSE results in 2016 had improved. I was also keen to explore the work you had done to: a) narrow the decreasing, but not eliminated, gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally with the same starting points, and b) to raise the most able pupils' progress. You explained that your fixed-term exclusion figures include pupils who spend a one-day exclusion at a partner school so they do not miss any of their education. Examining your attendance information revealed that disadvantaged pupils' attendance had improved during the summer term 2017 and again this year.
- GCSE results improved in many subjects in 2017. Science, technology and drama, for example, under new leadership and specialist teachers, are catching up fast to match the increasingly strong progress in English and mathematics. There were some excellent results in several subjects, revealing substantial progress from pupils' starting points. For example, around one third of pupils achieved A/A* grades in history and computer science. Nine pupils achieved all A*/A grades.
- With some success, staff have used numerous ways to lift disadvantaged and the most able pupils' progress. Leaders' tracking and evaluation of these pupils' achievements is meticulous. They have already identified that finding the right staff member to relate well with a particular pupil can make a big difference to that pupil's attitude to school life and work.
- You agree that further analysis of the actions taken to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, especially in Years 7 to 10, is the way forward. However, it is only right to acknowledge that 71% of disadvantaged pupils attained a pass grade in both English and mathematics, as did non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.
- At the same time as raising standards, you developed imaginatively the whole sixth form curriculum, particularly by the introduction of the International Baccalaureate (IB) career-related programme as one of four sixth-form pathways. One careers skill course emphasises 'critical and ethical thinking'. I saw Year 12 pupils reflecting and discussing Italian views on euthanasia and abortion in a reflective, mature way. Such study helps students to be

'internationally-minded and globally aware'.

- Students can choose the full IB course (which includes criminology and finance), combine IB elements with A levels, study three or four A levels or select the pro-soccer academy towards a sport-related career. You also welcome back a small number of students for three years if they need to retake either English or mathematics alongside sixth-form work in Year 12. You have thus catered for all ability levels in the sixth form. It is not surprising that Year 12 students outnumber those in Year 13 and applications for the 2018 intake are higher still.
- Many subjects broaden pupils' horizons, particularly technology, sport and creative subjects. These are well supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits. Leaders arrange outings to include the theatre, seaside, or London, for example – places which some pupils may not have experienced before.
- All IB programmes relate to a 'learner profile' of 10 attributes such as 'caring' and 'principled'. Leaders now use these attributes to structure 'progress time' and blend it with all the other ways pupils experience spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding. Learning about British values has been incorporated skilfully. I and my colleague saw several classes in different years reflecting sensitively on 'what makes a good leader?' Thoughtful suggestions included 'empowering', 'passion' and 'non-bias'. One pupil complimented you by saying that your particular skill was 'communication' because 'he talks to us'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to evaluate which actions have most successfully improved the progress of disadvantaged and most able pupils, so they can fine tune support for these groups of pupils in the future.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, who is also the chair of trustees for the divergent partnership trust; the chief executive officer of the trust; the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

This was the first inspection since the school formed the multi-academy trust, Divergent Partnership Trust, so that it could formally work alongside other local schools, particularly those needing support. The Department for Education and local authority are behind this arrangement. The previous headteacher is now the chief executive of the trust and you moved from being deputy headteacher to your current role when his position changed. You continue to work closely together.

My colleague and I visited lessons in the majority of subjects. We saw all years at work, including Years 11 and 13 revision sessions. We attended a few progress sessions in the morning.

We held meetings with: you and the chief executive, members of the senior team, some middle leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and groups of randomly selected pupils in Year 11, and Years 7 and 8 together. We took into account 52 staff and 147 pupil and student (no Year 11 and just four Year 13) responses to their questionnaires and 133 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and comments written by parents.