

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Helen Macdougall
Principal
Thomas Wolsey School
Defoe Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 6SG

Dear Ms Macdougall

Short inspection of Thomas Wolsey School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018 with Tania Perry, 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 outstanding in 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Safeguarding is effective.

Our first line of enquiry was to ensure that safeguarding procedures were fully in place and implemented by all and that parents and carers have confidence in the school to keep children safe.

You have ensured that everything is in place for staff checks and statutory duties regarding safeguarding. Upon joining the multi-academy trust, further checks were required; these are all underway, and an audit of processes has been undertaken. There remains some work to do to align the procedures and records of both the school and the trust.

Appropriate training has been undertaken by staff and they are all aware of the importance of keeping children safe. Any concerns are raised diligently and appropriate referrals are made to leaders, who follow through any actions with outside agencies, ensuring that appropriate help is obtained for the minority of families who require it.

All staff understand the vital link between monitoring attendance and safeguarding pupils. When you, as principal, took up post, you quickly instigated changes so that

there are immediate systematic checks on the attendance of all pupils. Parents now know they must contact the school the same day if a pupil is ill. Due to the nature of the complex medical conditions some of the pupils have, hospital admissions and appointments are an inevitable part of their plan. Returning to school after procedures is monitored carefully so that attendance can be increased. A very small minority of pupils are supported at home, as they are unable to access the school environment due to the level of risk with their medical conditions.

Pupils state they feel safe at school and feel fully included. Parents have confidence in the school and feel their child is safe at school. This was clear from the results of the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the school survey completed in September 2018. One or two parents remain concerned after the turbulence of the last few years and require ongoing support to regain their trust in the school.

Inspection findings

- An area of enquiry was to ensure that current leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and have plans in place for any areas for improvement. During strategy meetings and discussions, you have correctly identified areas in need of improvement and have begun the steps to rectify these. You also recognise that changes will take time to embed and evaluate. You are unable to measure the impact of their effectiveness just yet.
- Staff have a determination to work with pupils to achieve their best and are aware of pupils' individual strengths and areas for development. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in all classes. The inclusion of the multi-therapy team of physiotherapists, occupational and speech and language therapists on-site enables pupils to be positioned correctly and ready to learn. They work closely with staff to assist in training and development so that this is a benefit of the pupils in the classroom. The use of assistive technology integrated into lessons ensures that pupils of all abilities can join in the learning objectives and share the development of communication with their peers.
- The use of the school learning maps system, although new, builds on a strength of knowing the pupils really well, how they are able to learn and then make progress from their starting points. Learning maps are on display clearly for all staff to see and integrated into education, health and care plans.
- Pupils are very happy in and around the school. They are inquisitive, yet polite and very keen to talk about the school and their role on the school council. They feel included and have their views and voice heard regarding school improvements and activities. They have changed the school assemblies to be more age-appropriate and make use of the 'discuss-tub' where they can voice concerns, worries and solutions to problems.
- Pupils take part in national sporting competitions, trips to the theatre, which some groups were on during the inspection, and performing arts opportunities. As one pupil stated: 'At this school, if your dream is to be a wheelchair boxer you will be encouraged – at my last school I would have been told you can't do that.'

- A very small minority of older pupils feel that the work is not challenging enough for them. This was followed up through a visit to their classroom to look at their work and see how they are operating. Some of these students are the last cohort of pupils with greater academic abilities than the rest of the school. They are being helped to take part in appropriately challenging accredited courses and supported with transition to their next stage of education.
- Parents are supportive of the school in general and feel fully involved in understanding how and what the pupils are learning. The use of the online learning journal is appreciated, especially as parents can see for themselves the activities pupils are involved in on a regular basis. This allows for a high degree of interaction between home and school and is reflected in the positive views of parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and to the school's recent survey of parental views.
- Another key line of enquiry was to consider adaptations made to the curriculum to ensure that it is effective for all groups of pupils. You and your leadership team have designed a new curriculum to meet the needs of current pupils, which was implemented in September 2018. Pupils are building on steps of knowledge through their individualised learning maps. These reflect the long-term ambitious aims in their education, health and care plans. As one parent stated, 'The school is excellent at finding ways to allow pupils to take part and achieve in spite of their disabilities.'
- Pupils have a rich range of learning experiences, which enable them to develop skills across a variety of areas. They take part and achieve at high levels, such as in national disabled sporting competitions. They undertake arts and theatre trips to enhance learning, gaining high accreditations for the school such as the recently achieved Arts award at platinum level. Pupils are proud of their own and the school's achievements. Lunch and breaktimes are a positive learning and fun experience both inside when eating, and then outside in the playground areas. There was a variety of challenging activities such as football and sensory games, which were encouraged by staff to include everyone and generally led to having fun outside together.
- Staff are supportive of you, your leadership team, and the changes you have made and intend to make. Over half of the staff were not working at the school at the time of the last inspection. Staff recognise that there is further improvement to make in the school to ensure that it is reaching the highest possible standards for all the pupils. The vast majority feel well supported and well led and feel you are motivating them to do even more for the pupils. The principle of 'every second counts' is evident in all classrooms and activities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- embed the changes in the curriculum so that the school's learning maps are evaluated/analysed for impact and effectiveness for individual pupils and for different groups of pupils

- continue to monitor and address issues of the minority of pupils with persistent absence who have to work at home due to their severe medical needs
- continue to build parental confidence in all aspects of your work, so that they feel fully included and positive about the necessary changes needed to further improve the work of the school
- develop, improve and align administrative practices between the multi-academy trust and the school to enable and create an outstanding partnership to be of benefit to your school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, regional and national chair of the board of trustees of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Mullan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you, the acting principal of the school, the regional chair and the national chair of the multi-academy trust. I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. We visited a number of classes across the school with you and the acting vice principal. We met and spoke with pupils on the school council and observed pupils at lunchtime in the dining hall and playground. We took account of 28 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the parental questionnaire completed by 52 parents in September 2018. We also took account of 29 responses to the staff survey. We reviewed a range of school documentation, including information on the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness and information regarding safeguarding and pupil progress.