

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Solomon Berhane
Headteacher
St Catherine's College
Priory Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN23 7BL

Dear Mr Berhane

Short inspection of St Catherine's College

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 2018 with Stephen Long HMI, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 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 good as a result of this inspection.**

Since you took up post as headteacher in September 2018, you have acted swiftly and resolutely to address the issues that led to a decline in standards over the past two years. You were able to visit the school during the summer term to identify accurately the strengths of the school and priorities for improvement. Your compelling vision, high expectations and clear direction have been welcomed by pupils, staff and parents. Under your leadership, staff have been energised, and there is a collective excitement about the future.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes at the school. Staff restructuring led to a high turnover of teachers and other staff. This was unsettling and is finally slowing down, with staffing now more stable. In August 2016, the school converted to an academy as part of the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT). During the last academic year, the previous headteacher also covered the role of chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust. During this period of change, governors and school leaders were insufficiently focused on the school's curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning, with a resultant fall in standards. GCSE examination outcomes in 2017 were below national averages. Provisional results for 2018 indicate that pupils' overall progress and attainment scores remain below national averages, although the proportions of pupils achieving at least a grade 4 and grade 5 in both English and mathematics have improved.

You have rapidly introduced some changes to bring about the necessary improvements in pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching. These include: strengthening the school's behaviour policy; adjusting the curriculum; changing the structure of the school day to improve pupils' engagement; raising the expectations of teaching through clear guidance to teachers; and increasing leaders' levels of accountability. Inspectors saw early positive signs of the impact of all of these changes, although it is too soon to tell whether they will make the required difference in the longer term.

A large majority of pupils, staff and parents appreciate the changes you have implemented so quickly. In particular, many say that behaviour has improved. Inspectors found orderly conduct around the school. Pupils were polite and friendly and working diligently in lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves appeared strong. Nevertheless, a few parents and pupils have lingering concerns about pupils' behaviour in lessons and some remaining bullying. Pupils' attendance improved last year, although too many disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent. Determined action is being taken by school staff to raise the attendance of this group of pupils.

You have set about strengthening teaching, as you acknowledge that pupils are not consistently stretched or supported well enough to build securely on their prior knowledge. There is already a greater consistency of approach than previously during lessons, and pupils have responded well. However, although leaders know that pupils need to experience greater challenge, they are not clear about how to get pupils thinking so that they learn more deeply. Subject leaders are not using their expertise fully to develop the teaching in their areas to help pupils build their knowledge and understanding securely.

Governors are highly committed to the school and keep a close eye on many operational matters. Nevertheless, during the recent restructuring and turbulence governors have not held leaders rigorously to account for the impact of their actions on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. The local governing body has recently been strengthened by a governor with educational expertise. The school benefits from DCAT support for financial and personnel matters, freeing leaders to focus on the quality of education provided. Collaboration instigated recently with a local teaching school is helping leaders and teachers to develop their professional skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All administrative processes are completed effectively, and governors check these regularly. Staff training is up to date. The system for gathering and sharing information has been improved, as recommended at the last inspection. The new system enables leaders to respond rapidly to any concerns that arise. Leaders are well aware of local risks. Staff know pupils well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. For example, staff follow up on pupils' absences to ensure that they are safe. Leaders ensure that they seek the right

advice from other agencies when needed and show tenacity in following up concerns with the local authority.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors checked on leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the steps being taken to improve teaching and learning, outcomes, the curriculum and pupils' attendance.
- You and other leaders have accurately evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses and have taken several appropriate steps designed to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement. You have successfully galvanised leaders at all levels, and they welcome your sense of purpose and high expectations. The school's development plan clearly describes what needs to be improved alongside success criteria. Previously, leaders' evaluation has focused on the actions taken rather than the impact of those actions on pupils' outcomes and attendance. Systems are now in place to hold leaders to account more rigorously than previously.
- Pupils and staff spoke enthusiastically about the improved culture and ethos permeating the school. An emphasis on behaviour has significantly reduced levels of low-level disruption in lessons. Pastoral leaders and staff with expertise in raising attendance are using an appropriate range of strategies to tackle absence, although the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains too low.
- During inspectors' visits to lessons, teachers showed strong subject knowledge and pupils completed tasks willingly. Feedback by teachers in pupils' books follows the school policy consistently. However, sometimes the most able pupils are not fully challenged and those who need extra help are not well enough supported. This hinders them in making the progress of which they are capable. Leaders accurately identify that improvements are needed but are not yet confident in knowing precisely how to bring them about.
- You and other leaders have made some changes to the curriculum, designed to help pupils attain higher GCSE grades. For example, pupils will no longer take GCSE examinations at the end of Year 10. Also, subject leaders are reviewing schemes of work to promote better progression, and are keen to use their expertise to improve teaching for understanding in their subjects.
- Performance information for the end of key stage 4 shows that pupils' progress and overall attainment scores are below the national averages. This is due partly to the combination of subjects studied by pupils, a decline in the quality of teaching and ineffective preparation for the new GCSE courses. Results were weak in 2017 and provisional results this year are no better, overall. Leaders are aware that pupils' progress in science is weaker than in other subjects, and an external review of the department was underway during the inspection. A concerted effort to raise standards in English and mathematics has led to some improvement, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the increased accountability of leaders has a positive impact on the achievement of all groups of pupils
- teaching consistently challenges pupils and makes them think hard, so that they make good progress in a wide range of subjects
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your deputy headteachers and other senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met two governors and three representatives from DCAT, including the CEO. Together with leaders, inspectors visited classes across the school. We considered 61 responses by staff to Ofsted's online survey and two emails. We took careful account of 81 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 51 free text comments. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils and reviewed 79 responses by pupils to Ofsted's online survey. We looked at documents relating to the school's work, including the school's self-evaluation, development plan and safeguarding records.