

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Warren Brooks
Executive Headteacher
Mill Green School
Lansbury Avenue
Parr
St Helens
Merseyside
WA9 1BU

Dear Mr Brooks

Short inspection of Mill Green School

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2018 with Maggie Parker, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in 2016, you have worked to create an environment where pupils and students are thriving. Parents and carers are keen to choose the school for their children. One comment typified their views: 'Outcomes are amazing, far above what I expected.' During the inspection, a representative of the local authority described the school as 'a jewel in our crown'.

Staff are proud to work at the school and they challenge pupils and students to achieve to their very best. They actively encourage pupils to master new skills. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that they can meet the individual needs of pupils and students. The flexibility of the curriculum enables pupils to study qualifications tailored to their individual interests and ability. Pupils complete qualifications and develop skills that prepare them exceptionally well for the next steps in their education. Staff ensure that pupils receive recognition for their achievements and work closely with local businesses to create bespoke qualifications. This ensures that pupils demonstrate through evidence their achievements for potential employers

At the time of the previous inspection, inspectors asked members of the governing body to become better at judging how well the school is progressing. Governors have attended training to improve their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have also worked with senior leaders to improve the quality of

the information they receive. Governors show an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Consequently, the governing body provides appropriate challenge to leaders. Governors hold leaders to account for their actions.

At the previous inspection, inspectors also asked leaders to increase pupils' opportunities for vocational-learning experiences. There is now a broad vocational curriculum offer at the school, a part of which involves the local community. For example, pupils provide a gardening service, a community café and a hair salon for use by local people. Pupils benefit from qualifications in horticulture, floristry, catering, motor mechanics and construction. You have also developed the outdoor area. This means that staff and pupils benefit from outdoor learning spaces. For example, pupils have created their own 'market garden', and they enjoy relaxing in the open air.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. Staff carry out checks to ensure that governors and adults who are employed at the school are suitable to work with pupils. Staff receive appropriate training, which keeps them informed about the school's policies and procedures.

You ensure that pupils are safe when taking part in off-site activities. Pupils are well briefed on any possible dangers, and staff supervise pupils effectively. The leadership team's approach to promoting e-safety is thorough. Pupils know how to stay safe online and you offer parents training and resources. This means that they can better support their children to stay safe on the internet at home.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to know about pupils' progress in mathematics and English. Leaders have high expectations of staff and they set challenging targets for pupils. Leaders are keen to ensure that best practice in teaching is shared across the school. To this end, the leadership team monitor the quality of teaching closely. Staff benefit from bespoke training and support in order to refine and develop further their teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching is going from strength to strength and pupils make excellent progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers use accurate assessment information to plan very effective learning. This means teachers know what pupils can already do. Consequently, teachers very accurately match the work to pupils' needs. Pupils build very effectively on their prior knowledge and develop their learning further. A combination of high expectations and first-class teaching means that pupils aim high. They want to do well at school. Teachers plan learning to ensure that teaching assistants provide excellent support to pupils. As a result, the proportion of pupils who make outstanding progress has continued to grow since the previous inspection. This is especially the case in English and mathematics. Pupils make outstanding progress in both of these subjects.

- Overall, pupils are involved in making choices about their own learning and their qualifications. However, there are times when younger pupils are unclear about what they are working towards in their learning.
- I was also interested to know about pupils' rates of attendance. This is because, in recent years, the proportion of pupils regularly absent from school had started to increase. The family liaison officer has worked effectively to reverse this trend. You showed me examples of where staff had helped individual pupils to improve their attendance. Consequently, pupils' rates of absence have decreased and compare favourably with national averages.
- For those pupils who struggle to improve their attendance, staff provide them and their families with personalised support. Staff engage in regular and supportive contact with parents to ensure that they receive the help they need. This means that parents can support their children's learning at home. For example, where appropriate, pupils benefit from online learning. This allows pupils to continue to make progress when they are absent from school.
- Leaders have a strong focus on preparing students for the next stage in their education. I wanted to find out how well the curriculum supports this. The design of the curriculum encourages students to aspire to a wide range of job opportunities. It is highly individualised and flexible. It accommodates pupils' own aspirations and provides them with the opportunity to develop skills they need for everyday life.
- I also wanted to find out about the support leavers receive in finding appropriate placements. You arrange for local businesses and colleges to visit the school and speak with pupils and students. This helps to build very strong and highly effective relationships between the school, employers and colleges. As a result, students are extremely well prepared for the next step in their education. Where problems arise, leaders are proactive in supporting students. You and your staff ensure that support is provided so that employers and colleges can better meet students' needs. This support is available for up to 18 months after the student leaves Mill Green School.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more of the younger pupils are clear about what they are working towards at each stage in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders. An inspector also met with four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Inspectors met with two groups of students and spoke with pupils and students at social times. An inspector also met with a group of staff and a group of parents.

Leaders accompanied inspectors on visits to classrooms, where they observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects. They also looked at students' work across the school.

Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They also scrutinised a range of policies and leaders' school improvement plan and self-evaluation. Inspectors also checked on the school's website.

Inspectors considered the responses of 13 parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, along with free-text comments. They also took account of 47 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 25 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey.