

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 March 2019

Ms Helen Loughran
Headteacher
Freman College
Bowling Green Lane
Buntingford
Hertfordshire
SG9 9BT

Dear Ms Loughran

Short inspection of Freman College

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019 with Kathryn Herlock, 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 November 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has maintained its standards because of the strong leadership that you provide and the high expectations staff have of pupils. You, together with governors and the senior leadership team, have an accurate understanding of the school, with particular strength in how rigorously you evaluate the impact of your work to secure improvement. Leaders have worked hard to create a culture of high academic achievement. Staff and pupils are very supportive of this culture and are proud to be a part of the school community. Parents are highly appreciative of the work of staff. They have great confidence in the school and speak highly of the standards and ethos leaders have set.

Pupils behave very well and move around the school in a calm and orderly way. They are kind and respectful to each other and the school is proud of its caring ethos. Leaders actively encourage older students to mentor and care for younger pupils. Leaders also provide many ways for older students to take up leadership opportunities and this supports the culture of warm relationships and student responsibility.

Senior leaders have developed meticulous systems to monitor the quality of teaching and how well it contributes to pupils' progress. As a result, senior leaders have a comprehensive view of strengths and areas where improvement is necessary. You have rightly taken difficult decisions to ensure that the quality of provision across the school continues to meet the very high standards you expect.

Pupils' strong progress at key stage 4 is underpinned by a system of individual, personal academic support. As a result, the vast majority of pupils are successfully prepared for a wide range of further education, apprenticeship and employment opportunities. Pupils enjoy their learning, and say: 'Teachers know the work that is best for us.' Pupils actively take part in their lessons and appreciate the wide variety of subjects such as Latin and finance. You have introduced additional vocational subjects to further enrich the curriculum offer in key stages 4 and 5. This has led to more pupils choosing to study in the sixth form at Freman College. Governors see this is an important educational offer as there is a scarcity of key stage 5 provision in the local area.

The previous inspection report highlighted the need for the school to further improve outcomes in the sixth form by developing teaching strategies that lead to higher levels of progress. Leadership in the sixth form continues to be strong, providing an environment where students are well supported and guided to make progress. However, progress made by students in the different subjects at key stage 5 is still varied. Leaders continue to work hard to address this issue. Students' progress between key stages 4 and 5 is still not as high as it could be. Attendance in the sixth form is above the national average and continues to improve; however, attendance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is lower than that of other students.

The previous inspection report also highlighted the need for the school to further improve teaching by consistently sharing the best practice and ensuring that teachers make the most of pupils' enthusiasm for learning. You and your leadership team have implemented staff training programmes that have further improved the effectiveness of teaching. You support staff well to teach at a high standard, and you have rigorous systems to monitor the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. This is especially true in key stage 4, where pupils' progress is strongest.

School leaders are successful in ensuring that pupils joining Freman College from their middle schools experience a well-planned and thoughtful transition process. Parents say that this is a strength of the school and they appreciate the care that staff show towards the pupils during this time. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is well planned across Years 5 to 11 and that they introduce pupils to the high academic expectations in a way that allows them to make progress as soon as they join the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements. Before appointing staff, leaders carry out all the required employment checks. Training for staff and governors is up to date and they are trained in how to keep pupils safe from abuse, exploitation and in the 'Prevent' duty.

Pupils feel safe at school. They told inspectors that staff care for them well and are approachable. Staff, pupils and parents all say that bullying is not an issue at Freman College. If it does occur, it is dealt with swiftly and pupils are confident in their teachers' support. Leaders and staff work hard to ensure positive relationships in school and pupils know who they can talk to if they have concerns. There is a carefully

structured programme of personal, social, health and economic education delivered in lessons, tutor time and assemblies. For example, guests who have real-life experience of difficult social issues speak in assemblies. This is very well received and is part of the effective support for pupils' personal development. The Ofsted online survey for pupils revealed that around a third of pupils did not agree that the school encourages them to look after their own health and well-being.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, my colleague and I focused on the following lines of enquiry: how leaders implement strategies to promote pupils' progress in key stage 4; the progress of pupils from a disadvantaged background; the progress of students in the sixth form; and the quality of transition arrangements from middle to upper school.
- Senior leaders have implemented strategies such as middle leaders engaging with examination boards, encouraging them to become examiners and moderators. You and your senior team closely manage the key stage 4 courses, working with middle leaders to address weaknesses in provision. You have rigorous processes for monitoring the impact of the work of heads of department. This has led to a successful key stage 4 experience for the vast majority of pupils, who make strong progress.
- The progress of pupils from a disadvantaged background fell substantially last year, where previously these pupils made as much progress as others nationally. Leaders demonstrate an understanding of factors that may have contributed to this and have implemented a strategy to address this. During the inspection we saw evidence that your approach is already having a positive effect on the progress for this group of pupils.
- The attendance of pupils from a disadvantaged background needs to improve. The school's internal data shows that the absence rate for these pupils is currently double that of other pupils in key stage 4. The numbers of pupils from a disadvantaged background who are absent for more than 10% of school days (persistently absent) is also currently double that of other pupils in key stage 4.
- Leaders identify that low aspirations play a role in the outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. You use the pupil premium grant wisely to support the academic and pastoral development of these pupils. This includes smaller English and mathematics classes for the past three years and a mentoring programme involving sixth-form students supporting these pupils. You and your team have high expectations and are determined that the progress of these pupils returns to levels where it at least matches the progress of other pupils.
- All students in the sixth form follow appropriate pathways when they leave school. Many of them go on to attend high-performing universities. Leaders have implemented a new strategy of personal support for Year 12 students, recognising that these students need help to adapt to the nature of A-level study. Staff have high expectations of students in the sixth form and you have ensured that staff are well trained to deliver high-quality lessons. Leaders take sensible actions to support departments where outcomes fall below your expectations.
- Leaders ensure that the transition process to Freman College is not simply a set of

procedures. They take time to invest in building relationships at an early stage with pupils and staff in the middle schools. The transition of vulnerable pupils is especially well planned, ensuring they can make progress and settle into school quickly, along with other pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their levels of attendance to school and progress
- developments in the sixth form continue so that students make good progress in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Osagie
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the inspectors carried out the following activities: held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team and members of the governing body; met with a group of pupils from key stage 4; visited lessons with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team; considered responses from the Ofsted online survey for pupils, parents and staff; reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and information about pupils' outcomes, progress and attendance; reviewed safeguarding documentation and procedures; scrutinised the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school; and carried out website checks to confirm that it meets publication requirements.