

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Edward O'Neill
Headteacher
Eaton Bank Academy
Jackson Road
Congleton
Cheshire
CW12 1NT

Dear Mr O'Neill

Short inspection of Eaton Bank Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 April 2019 with David Woodhouse, 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.

Since the last inspection you have strengthened leadership at all levels. Your leadership team and the governors understand your vision for the school and work with you to make Eaton Bank Academy the best that it can be. As a result, pupils' progress in the published examination information has improved steadily over the last three years and is now in line with national averages. This improvement in progress is continuing for current pupils.

Although progress has improved for all pupils there are some groups of pupils who do not learn as well as others. For example, disadvantaged pupils make considerably less progress than other pupils and boys do not make as much progress as girls. This is because you do not always have a sharp focus on how strategies for improvement impact on these various groups of pupils.

Together with your teaching and learning lead, you have transformed the development of teaching within the school. Your middle leaders are helping to drive improvements in teaching through professional dialogue and collaboration. The professional, cross-curricular learning groups that you have introduced allow teachers to talk about pedagogy and share ideas to help pupils learn. This is growing into a self-generating process of improvement.

Despite the improvements to teaching, teachers do not typically focus on the development of literacy skills. Pupils' work shows a considerable difference between

the standards of boys' and girls' writing. The work seen in pupils' books demonstrated that boys typically have more difficulty writing high-quality answers using appropriate, subject-specific vocabulary.

You have created a warm and welcoming environment in the school. Pupils are friendly to visitors, and polite and respectful to each other and adults around the building. Pupils behave well both during learning and in social areas. They are typically attentive and engaged in their learning.

Pupils told inspectors that they learned how to keep themselves safe, particularly online. They said that they felt safe in school and that there was always someone to talk to if they had any concerns. They said that bullying did happen sometimes but that the teachers dealt with it appropriately.

Staff are grateful for the opportunities for professional development that you have provided. They feel valued and trusted. They think that you lead the school well and give them support when needed. Staff say that pupils are well behaved and safe in school.

Governors are knowledgeable and bring a range of relevant skills to the governance of the school. They are supportive of you while understanding the need to hold you to account for the progress and welfare of pupils. They know the next steps that the school needs to take to develop further.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to improve teaching and learning particularly for disadvantaged pupils. You have done this in part: teaching is improving, and disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make stronger progress. However, there continues to be a significant difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a strength. All staff, including governors, are trained each year and updates are provided frequently so that staff are made aware of any concerns or changes promptly. Checks on anybody who works in or visits the school are thorough and ensure that only those who are safe to work with children do so.

Staff are aware of the concerns most likely to affect pupils in the school. You provide additional training to ensure that you and your team can provide effective support in these areas. You have developed strong local links and work with parents to provide the best care for children in need. Referrals are made promptly when necessary.

You have also put in place a pupils' safeguarding welfare group. This group provides additional support for pupils who have concerns. It consists of pupils who have been trained as peer supporters and who give other pupils a further safe place to go to should they require help.

Inspection findings

- The inspection followed several lines of enquiry. The first was to see how well teaching has been developed so that all groups of pupils make good progress. There is a lack of consistency in the teaching across different subject areas. Some, for instance in science and mathematics, is better at meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils. However, in other subject areas the impact of teaching on this group is not as strong.
- You have not evaluated the developments that you have put in place to determine which have most impact for the different groups of pupils. Where teaching strategies engage disadvantaged pupils and boys, they learn well. Teachers' activities help them to understand their learning and pupils can make good progress. However, you have not ensured that there are enough opportunities during teachers' professional dialogue sessions for teachers to share the strategies that work for different groups of pupils. This would help all groups to make greater gains in their learning across all subjects.
- Pupils work demonstrated that some teachers use questioning effectively to build on pupils' prior learning. When this happens, pupils develop deeper understanding and make good progress. However, where pupils struggle to make connections with past learning, they become confused and this limits their progress.
- The work in pupils' books demonstrated that boys have weaker literacy skills than girls. In particular, the use of academic language was far weaker for boys. There is insufficient focus on the development of literacy in subjects beyond English and this hampers pupils' progress. This poor use of language skills continues to hinder pupils' learning as they move into the sixth form.
- My second line of enquiry was how well you have helped disadvantaged pupils to overcome their barriers to learning. You have put in place effective attendance monitoring systems together with support processes that have had considerable positive effect. Attendance measures are now in line with national averages for all groups of pupils.
- My final line of enquiry was the extent to which students in the sixth form are making better progress. The improvements in teaching across the school are also leading to stronger progress in the sixth form. However, the same issues seen in the lower school are present in the sixth form. For example, leaders do not focus sharply enough on the performance of all groups of students or improving students' literacy skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that across all key stages, including the sixth form:

- evaluation of planned actions is more sharply focused on the impact for different groups of pupils
- strong teaching practice is shared effectively so that all groups of pupils,

particularly boys and those who are disadvantaged, are thoroughly engaged in their learning

- teachers build learning sequentially, probing pupils' knowledge and enabling them to deepen their understanding
- literacy skills are developed in all subject areas so that standards of writing improve for all pupils, and particularly for boys.

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

Yours sincerely

Erica Sharman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors examined a range of documents including safeguarding records and policies; information on pupils' performance and attendance; and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan.

Inspectors met with you and other members of your leadership team. I met with four members of the governing body, including the vice-chair. I spoke to the local authority representative.

Jointly with school leaders, inspectors observed learning in several subject areas and looked at work in pupils' books. We spoke formally and informally to groups of pupils from all year groups. We observed pupils' behaviour, both in lessons and during social times.

We reviewed the 197 responses to the pupils' survey and the 179 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the 99 responses that parents submitted to the free-text service as well as the 63 responses to the staff questionnaire.