

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Mark McElwee
Headteacher
Parrs Wood High School
Wilmslow Road
East Didsbury
Manchester
M20 5PG

Dear Mr McElwee

Short inspection of Parrs Wood High School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2019 with Ailsa Moore, Ofsted Inspector, and Colin Bell, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the leadership team have a thorough and accurate understanding of what the school does well. Leaders are acutely aware of those aspects of the school that still require further development. Leaders reflect regularly on their actions and refine them appropriately. This has resulted in several improvements recently, for example the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in English and mathematics.

Staff are very positive about the school. Almost all the staff who responded to Ofsted's survey are proud to work at the school. They feel that leaders support them well. Staff appreciate the training they receive to improve and refine their practice.

Pupils are pleased to be part of a culturally diverse and caring community. They appreciate the help and guidance they receive from their teachers. Pupils in key stage 3 welcome the wealth of extra-curricular activities on offer. Older pupils explained to inspectors how they are keen to raise money for charity and local good causes.

Pupils feel they are listened to by staff. Pupils enthusiastically develop their leadership skills, for example by being a member of the school council. Students in the sixth form were especially positive about the opportunities they have to learn about different faiths and religions, for instance as part of a 'spiritual awareness

day'. Sixth-form students value the support they receive with their preparations for further education, employment and training.

Parents and carers appreciate the opportunities the school offers their children. The following comment from one parent typifies their views, 'The school tries to find ways in which each pupil can shine.' Almost 90% of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to others.

Governors and trustees have a detailed understanding of those aspects of the school that could be better. For example, they are aware of the underachievement historically in humanities and the recent decline in students' attendance in the sixth form. Members of the governing body and the board of trustees monitor these areas closely and hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders' systems to check that adults at the school are safe to work with pupils are effective. Staff receive regular safeguarding training. They understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil. Leaders respond in a timely manner to any referrals made. They ensure that vulnerable pupils receive appropriate support from a range of external agencies. Those responsible for governance check that systems to keep pupils safe are robust and fit for purpose.

Leaders and staff have created a tolerant and respectful school community. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are rare. They are confident that staff deal effectively with any concerns they may have. Neither pupils nor staff tolerate any form of discrimination, including racism or homophobia. Pupils explained to inspectors how members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community can be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors report they feel safe in school. Staff agree that pupils are safe. Pupils learn about how to look after their own emotional health and how to stay safe. For instance, pupils learn about the dangers of knife crime and the possible negative effects of social media. Some pupils act as 'mental health ambassadors' to promote the importance of talking about some of the issues faced by their peers.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors were keen to learn about the actions you have taken to raise pupils' achievement in history and geography. This is because, for the last two years, pupils have made fewer gains in their learning in these subjects than their peers nationally. In recent years, there have been a considerable number of changes to staffing in these subject areas. Leaders have acted to stabilise staffing and strengthened the leadership of the humanities department. Teachers in history and geography have also benefited from appropriate training. This has been effective in securing improvements in the quality of teaching.

- Leaders recognise that, in the past, the curricula for history and geography at key stage 3 have not provided pupils with the knowledge to succeed in future learning at key stage 4. More recently, leaders have made significant changes to the key stage 3 curriculum. This means that pupils secure the most important knowledge and skills. Following leaders' actions, the progress made by pupils in these subjects is improving. However, weaknesses in the curriculum in the past, alongside weaknesses in the quality of teaching, mean that some pupils lack important knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in key stage 4.
- Inspectors wanted to know about the quality of support for those pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour. We were particularly interested in the support provided for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who speak English as an additional language. This is because, in the past, these groups of pupils have been more likely to be excluded from school for a fixed period than their peers.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and their behaviour. Pupils and staff have a clear understanding of the school's behaviour systems. Pupils regard them as 'clear and fair'. Pupils are polite and move around the school calmly. The small proportion of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour receive appropriate support from staff.
- Pupils who are excluded from school for a fixed period benefit from a range of effective pastoral support when they return to school. As a result, recently there has been a reduction in the proportion of pupils excluded from school, including for pupils who are disadvantaged and especially for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Inspectors were interested to know why the proportion of pupils choosing to study a modern foreign language at key stage 4 has declined for the last two years. Pupils make excellent progress in languages at key stage 4. For instance, in 2018, pupils' achievement in languages at key stage 4 placed the school in the top 20% nationally.
- To increase further the proportion of pupils who choose to study a modern foreign language, you have made changes to the curriculum at key stage 3. This means that more pupils now benefit from high-quality teaching in languages in key stage 3. You have also made changes to the careers education, information, advice and guidance that pupils receive in Year 9. Following these changes, more pupils are choosing to study a modern foreign language in Year 10.
- Inspectors were keen to learn about the reasons for the decline in students' progress in academic courses in the sixth form over the last two years. In 2018, students in the sixth form made progress in line with their peers nationally in several subjects, including chemistry, business studies and economics. However, there are some subjects where students make fewer gains in their learning, for example in English literature, art and ancient history.
- Most teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve in the sixth form. However, there are some teachers who do not challenge students enough to meet these high expectations. Consequently, some students do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable.
- Leaders are aware that a decline in students' attendance is also affecting the

progress students make. Leaders in the sixth form have responded by strengthening the systems they use to monitor students' attendance. Leaders have also refined the support students receive to help them to maintain good attendance. These changes are having a positive effect, especially on students' attendance in Year 13. Nonetheless, there are some students, particularly those in Year 12, who do not attend as regularly as they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers identify and address the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in history and geography
- they reduce further students' absence in the sixth form, particularly in Year 12
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what students in the sixth form can achieve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Greater Manchester Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders, including the executive principal and a group of teachers. An inspector also met with a group of leaders from the humanities department.

Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils, one group from key stage 3 and another from key stage 4. An inspector also met with a group of students in the sixth form. Inspectors spoke with and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times.

Inspectors observed learning and looked at work produced by pupils and students across a range of subjects. Inspectors spoke with five governors and trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees.

Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, governance and leaders' analyses of information about pupils, and students' behaviour. Inspectors considered leaders' self-evaluation and documents relating to school improvement.

Inspectors considered the 84 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 78 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the 124 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 107 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey.