

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Ian Hunkin
Headteacher
The Harbour School
Tipner Lane
Tipner
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO2 8RA

Dear Mr Hunkin

Short inspection of The Harbour School

Following my visit to the school on 14 May 2019 with Mark Bagust, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have led the school with an exceptional level of passion and commitment to drive improvements since the last inspection. You recognise the emotional and social difficulties faced by pupils in your school, and forming strong relationships underpins your approach to improving outcomes. You and your leaders have worked tirelessly to grow the trust and confidence of pupils and their families through building positive connections. You accurately assess the barriers to learning faced by pupils, and address both the academic and social and emotional needs of pupils to enable them to succeed. Parents and pupils greatly value the support you provide and they recognise the benefits that your school delivers. One parent described the school as 'going above and beyond for the children'.

Leaders and staff are ambitious for the pupils and are intent on improving their life chances. Academic and personal development are carefully and regularly tracked to ensure that pupils are meeting targets, including attendance. As a result, leaders are able accurately to identify underachievement and put in support in a timely manner. Consequently, high proportions of pupils achieve or exceed expectations,

and those leaving key stage 4 do so with an impressive range of both academic and vocational qualifications.

You have created a vibrant, calm and purposeful environment in which pupils are able to thrive. You have a strong and coherent rationale for the curriculum, which is based on an appropriately personalised approach to meet pupils' needs and aspirations. The broad and rich curriculum supports pupils' personal and social development as well as leading to very strong progress in academic and vocational learning. Pupils engage well in lessons, take a pride in their work and are positive about the future. They appreciate the care and understanding the school provides.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about your leadership and the importance placed on maintaining their well-being. They whole-heartedly support the vision and ethos of the school to identify and meet the needs of pupils, who have had a negative experience of education, to achieve positive life outcomes. The staff feel that they get strong support from leaders to improve their practice. You make sure that all staff benefit from appropriate training.

Governors provide extremely effective challenge and invaluable support to school leaders in equal measure. They visit the school regularly and have a detailed understanding of the school's work and how individual pupils are achieving. You play a key part in ensuring that there is effective partnership working across all schools in the local authority to meet the social, emotional and mental-health needs of its pupils, and are seen as a lead professional in this specialism. You and your leaders seek out and embrace ideas from professional research to continue improving the provision and outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the whole school. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies and procedures are detailed and relevant, and support staff in making the right decisions in identifying and reporting concerns. The staff team as a whole has a strong working knowledge of safeguarding issues and understands the risks to their pupils. It is able to identify pupils who may be in need of early help or are at risk of neglect, abuse or exploitation. Staff engage closely with parents, carers and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

The systems to safeguard pupils are robust and are monitored rigorously by leaders, including governors, who take swift action when safeguarding concerns are raised. There are well-developed strategies to keep pupils safe. The school recognises the significance of regular attendance and personal well-being in enabling pupils to keep themselves safe, and takes steps to address poor attendance. The curriculum provides clear direction in supporting pupils to understand risks and in how to manage them. Pupils say that they feel safe and know who to turn to when they are worried or feel at risk. Parents agree that their children are safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we examined how well leaders have continued to improve the school's effectiveness, and how you have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. We particularly looked at the progress and outcomes for pupils, and we focused on how well the curriculum supports learning and prepares pupils for their next steps in education or employment. We considered how leaders have supported pupils to improve their attendance. We also evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- Leaders on each site carefully assess pupils on arrival across all areas of learning, including their social and emotional development, to establish accurately their starting points. Teachers and leaders use this information well to devise individual targets that are both ambitious and achievable with a clear link to successful longer-term outcomes. The school's most recent assessment tracking information indicates that pupils generally make very strong progress, and this is supported by the evidence found in their work. Wherever possible, pupils are supported to return to mainstream placements, or for those in key stage 4 to access college placements or training and employment. You use your analysis of the data to effectively challenge leaders on each site and ensure there are high expectations of pupils. However other leaders also need to take responsibility for understanding the data across the whole school.
- The curriculum has been designed to be able to provide a range of opportunities to meet the needs of pupils across all the sites. The broad range of subjects offered, alongside the support for personal development, enables pupils to follow their interests and aspirations to re-engage in education. There remains a strong focus on English and mathematics which ensures that pupils achieve well in these areas.
- Teachers plan for learning which is challenging but focused on supporting pupils to build on their knowledge and skills. As a result, a high number of pupils are able return to mainstream education in key stage 3. In key stage 4 there is a wide vocational curriculum offer, with excellent facilities, which engages pupils in learning and results in them achieving a high number of qualifications. These qualifications help them to proceed successfully into further education, employment and training. Pupils in Year 11 told inspectors that they feel well prepared for their next stage and are confident that they will succeed.
- Leaders have developed well-considered strategies to improve behaviour and attendance. Actions have included visiting families and working with other agencies to provide the support needed to enable pupils to attend more regularly. Every pupil has an attendance target as part of their individual learning plan and a personalised curriculum linked to their aspirations. As a result, attendance has improved. Pupils behave well in lessons and show commitment to their learning, which has resulted both in a reduction in exclusions and improved progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all senior leaders have a clearer understanding of the curriculum provision and progress data across the whole school so that they are better able to challenge and support each other.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Johns
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We considered a range of school information, including your self-evaluation and current school improvement plans. We discussed your assessment of pupils' progress across the school, and you shared with us evidence of your assessment process. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies, the single central register of checks on staff, and a sample of safeguarding files. We looked at attendance and behaviour records.

During the day inspectors met with you, other members of the leadership team, and staff. I also had a discussion with the chair of the interim executive board and one other governor. I spoke to two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors conducted learning walks with yourself and assistant headteachers. We visited classrooms across all the school sites. We spoke to pupils and looked at their work. Inspectors met formally with a group of staff, and spoke with a number of parents. I also took account of the seven free-text comments and the nine responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I considered 69 responses to the staff survey and seven responses to the pupil survey.