

12 June 2019

Mr Conor Renihan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Renihan

Short inspection of The Gateway School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 2019 with Elizabeth Moore, 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 Gateway School was judged to be outstanding in June 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have led the school successfully through a number of challenges since the last inspection. You have recognised that the school is educating a changing group of pupils with increasingly complex needs. More pupils are presenting with a wider range of needs, including autism spectrum disorder, moderate learning difficulties and increased mental-health concerns. These are in addition to the typical behaviour and social and emotional difficulties with which the school is used to dealing. Pupils also often present with more than one need. This has increased pupils' complexity of demands placed upon the school.

You and other leaders have responded well to this by closely re-evaluating the curriculum at key stage 4. You have carefully considered how to balance the amount of time pupils spend in academic learning with engaging in activities and experiences to develop their social and emotional well-being. This has had a positive effect on pupils' learning, attendance and engagement at this key stage. However, there is scope to bring forward plans to amend the key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that pupils in this key stage continue to achieve as well as they do currently.

Underpinning the curriculum is a very clear focus on the qualities and character you

wish to develop in pupils. This has had a significant impact on the social skills and well-being of pupils. Parents and carers say pupils are 'taught how to balance the disappointments that life can bring with the celebration of success'. Pupils learn to treat each other and staff with respect. It is clear that the longer pupils stay in the school the more positive their outlook becomes and the better they achieve and attend.

The governors fulfil their statutory duties particularly well and their contributions strengthen the leadership of the school. Governors and leaders work closely together in their roles to ensure the very best provision for pupils. Governors visit the school on a regular basis and, therefore, know the school well. This enables them to hold leaders to account for their decisions. For example, governors have challenged leaders over inclusive practice with regard to exclusions. Consequently, procedures have been reviewed and the number of exclusions has reduced.

Teachers have very high aspirations for pupils. They have excellent subject knowledge and always expect pupils to give of their best. They encourage pupils to be more resilient and learn from their mistakes. Pupils remember what they learned in previous lessons which took place some time ago. Teachers' assessments of what pupils have learned are used precisely to plan lessons to meet pupils' needs. This helps them secure their knowledge, address any gaps in their learning and tackle more-challenging work. Pupils use an increasing range of complex and precise words to explain their ideas and knowledge. In mathematics, teachers ensure that pupils can reason and solve problems. Pupils are positive about their learning, typically telling an inspector, 'I work my hardest and push through to be the best I can.' Consequently, pupils continue to make very strong progress in their academic learning, including in English, mathematics and science.

As an outcome of the school's previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the attendance of a minority of pupils for whom attendance had been a challenge. The changing nature of pupils' needs has made this more difficult for you. You have assigned a senior leader to have a clear oversight of the attendance of these pupils. You had evidence of the impact of the strategies you have used for individual pupils and how their progress is tracked, and the significant impact made. You have introduced the use of the 'outreach house'. This facility provides a safe place for pupils who are finding attendance difficult and accommodates their needs well. It enables staff to respond flexibly to support pupils, for example by providing education in the home for short, carefully monitored periods of time. The school has taken responsibility for transport arrangements for pupils to and from school. Leaders use this flexibly to improve pupils' access to the school. Consequently, attendance has continued to improve, particularly at key stage 4. The positive approach taken by the school and pupils was demonstrated at the time of the inspection by, for example, all Year 11 pupils attending all of their examinations.

You were also asked to ensure that the vocational learning centre is used to extend students' achievement and prepare them for life after school. You have increased the provision in the centre to include hair and beauty facilities and introduced qualifications in bicycle repair. You work closely with local companies to provide

provision for motor vehicle repair and work experience. This has led to all pupils leaving the centre to take up a place on appropriate apprenticeships, including a bespoke shoe-making company. Consequently, pupils are prepared exceptionally well for their transitions to work and next phases of learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant in identifying potential signs of abuse and are meticulous in their reporting. Referrals to outside agencies are timely and appropriate. The school is tenacious in pursuing such referrals. Pupils in the school feel safe. Any potential concerns regarding bullying are dealt with sensitively and compassionately by staff. Regular analysis of school data helps staff prioritise training to reduce the risk of the vulnerabilities of your pupils.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection inspectors looked to see if pupils in the school were kept safe; whether they were making very strong progress in mathematics, English and science; whether pupils were attending the school more often and how well pupils are prepared for life beyond The Gateway School.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge which is used to create learning opportunities with great effect. They know the individual learning needs of pupils very well and precisely match work to pupils' next steps in learning. Teachers plan specific support for pupils, including for the most able, so pupils' progress is consistently strong.
- Subject leaders work together to promote literacy across the school. For example, the leaders of science and English are working closely together to help pupils develop their scientific vocabulary. Consequently, pupils articulate their knowledge more precisely.
- Leaders have introduced a bespoke assessment system which allows teachers to precisely match work to pupils' needs. Pupils are able to consolidate knowledge and make very strong progress.
- Leaders have created a research group of staff members which ensures that developments within the school are evidence based and sharply focused. Consequently, school-improvement activities promote well pupils' learning.
- The school works effectively with mainstream providers to enhance provision and contributes to the teaching school alliance activities, such as leading the behaviour partnership board. Leaders influence highly effective, inclusive practices in other schools and settings, enabling pupils in these schools to make better progress.
- Governance is strong and leaders have a positive relationship with governors. Consequently, governors exercise their statutory duties particularly well.
- Adults in the school consistently model positive behaviour and respect. As a result, pupils' behaviour improves over time and they demonstrate enthusiasm

and show tenacity in the face of challenge.

- Pupils benefit from a well-thought-out and balanced curriculum which promotes very well pupils gaining academic knowledge, their development of social skills and emotional well-being, and preparation for their next steps in life.
- Leaders with responsibility for post-16 provision are adept in ensuring that students are exceptionally well prepared for the world of work. This includes students accessing appropriate high-quality qualifications and work-experience and practising interview skills and apprenticeship application writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they bring forward plans to rewrite the key stage 3 curriculum so it provides a clear and coherent sequence of learning for each subject which enables pupils to continue making strong progress academically, in their social skills and in their emotional well-being.

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

Yours sincerely

Steven Barnes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also spoke with the chair of the governing body, the deputy headteacher and other members of the leadership team. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, read all free-text comments and spoke on the telephone to some parents in the afternoon. I considered the responses from staff to Ofsted's questionnaire regarding their views of the school and its leadership. Inspectors and the deputy headteacher visited learning areas together. I looked at many samples of pupils' work in their books and on display. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during lunchtime. I spoke with pupils about their view of the school. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and their plans for its further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information.