

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



16 July 2019

Mr Kieran Scanlon
Principal
The Sir Robert Woodard Academy
Upper Boundstone Lane
Sompting
West Sussex
BN15 9QZ

Dear Mr Scanlon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Sir Robert Woodard Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections, in January 2018, December 2015 and October 2013.

Senior leaders and the responsible authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that systems and routines now firmly established in the school lead to pupils experiencing consistently good teaching and, consequently, making good progress over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of Year 10 pupils, and representatives of both the academy council and the Woodard Academies Trust. Relevant documents were considered, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, and information about pupils' attendance and academic performance. Reports from external reviews of governance, pupil premium funding and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were scrutinised, alongside a sample of minutes and visit reports from the academy council and trust. Brief visits were made to six lessons, alongside senior leaders, to observe learning, look at pupils' books and talk to them about their work. The school's arrangements for checks on adults working in the school were also reviewed.

Context

Since the school's last inspection, curriculum directors have been introduced as part of middle leadership arrangements. Two new members of staff have taken up leadership posts in the mathematics department. The school's catchment area has changed in response to a local need for more school places. The number of pupils joining Year 7 in September 2019 far exceeds the number of pupils who have just completed Year 11, indicating a rise to the number of pupils on the school roll.

Main findings

When the school was last inspected, you and your vice-principals were relatively new in post. Since then, your work to raise standards has continued determinedly, aimed at making sustainable improvements. Your accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses helps to prioritise your work appropriately. You note that staff and governors now have a 'better sense of where the school is' than in the past. That common sense of purpose enables everyone to move forward together to develop effective provision that benefits all of your pupils.

Senior and middle leaders have rightly focused their efforts on ensuring that pupils experience consistently good teaching. In particular, leaders know that getting things right during key stage 3 is vital, so that pupils have firm foundations of knowledge to build on at GCSE. Staff now have a clear and shared understanding of what good teaching looks like at The Sir Robert Woodard Academy. This is captured successfully by leaders' 'DNA' model, which sets out how learning is promoted through consistently high expectations, development of literacy and numeracy, and appropriate challenge and support for pupils. Useful training is helping to share and develop effective practice across the school. Teachers' understanding of pupils' different needs is supported well by a consistent expectation about the information that staff have and share appropriately with each other. This helps teachers to plan learning that meets pupils' different needs more successfully than before, using secure subject knowledge well. However, learning activities do not routinely build

precisely enough on pupils' different levels of prior learning. As a result, pupils' progress over time and across the curriculum, while improving, is not currently good enough.

The school's work to provide for its most vulnerable pupils is developing successfully. Leaders have sensibly reviewed provision for pupils with SEND, using expertise from beyond the school to guide their work. Staff now have a clearer understanding of how to meet pupils' needs through high-quality teaching in the classroom. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) supports them effectively, using monitoring of classroom practice to ensure that staff training is relevant and helpful. Similar work is helping to raise the profile of disadvantaged pupils across the school, leading to them making strong progress in some areas of the curriculum, such as the performing arts. A pivotal and successful part of this work has been around reducing persistent absence for this group of pupils, as well as for other pupils in the school. However, although disadvantaged pupils' overall progress by the end of Year 11 is improving gradually, they continue to achieve well below other pupils nationally.

During my visit, adults' high expectations for pupils' behaviour and engagement with learning was evident. Staff unanimously understand that the priority is now about 'alignment' – ensuring that good practice evident across the school becomes firmly embedded across the school. Although pupils' learning experience is now much improved, there remains a legacy of underperformance. Consequently, although pupils' attainment by the end of Year 11 is rising, this does not currently represent them making good progress over time. Published outcomes at the end of 2018 showed that pupils' average progress by the end of key stage 4 continued to be below the national average and declined from the year before. Pupils' work and information shared by leaders show that standards are rising for pupils currently in the school, including in the sixth form. Progress over the course of this year has been stronger than in previous years, but will need to be sustained over time so that pupils attain the standards they are capable of by the time they leave the school.

Middle leadership has been strengthened by the introduction of curriculum directors, who oversee subject and/or faculty areas. They are evolving in their roles, supported by useful and relevant training. As a result, they understand the school's priorities and how to ensure their work contributes successfully to achieving them. They can explain how improvements to the school's systems and assessment processes enable them to focus rigorously on whether pupils' achievement in their subject areas is 'good enough' compared with national standards. They contribute usefully to systematic monitoring of teaching and learning in their 'directorates'. Consequently, directors hold teachers effectively to account for the difference their work makes to pupils' outcomes, putting support and training in place where needed.

Since the last inspection, poor attendance in the sixth form has been tackled

successfully through the work of pastoral support staff. Tutor-time and study periods are now used more effectively than in the past. Leaders use transition interviews well to ensure that students understand both what to expect from their sixth-form experience and what is expected of them. Leaders' routines for checking the quality of sixth-form teaching and learning are now more closely aligned with those established in the rest of the school, which supports the rigour of leaders' work to check standards. As a result, standards are rising in the sixth form, although, as for the rest of the school, they remained below average by the end of Year 13 last year.

The academy council (local governing body) and Woodard Academies Trust have responded robustly to the findings of an external review of governance. They have reviewed and adapted formal lines of accountability and strengthened communication between the council and the trust. As a result, the trust and academy council are now suitably focused, and their collective work is well aligned to support ongoing school improvement. There is a shared and accurate view about the school's current position and what needs to be done to ensure that pupils' outcomes improve securely and sustainably.

External support

Both the local authority and National Governance Association (NGA) have supported the school through their rigorous reviews of governance, pupil premium funding and provision for pupils with SEND. Although these reviews did not take place until the autumn term, leaders' actions in response to them have been timely and appropriate.

Leaders also make effective use of links with other local 'Woodard' schools that are not part of the multi-academy trust, but which are supporting improvements in teaching, learning, leadership and local governance.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector