

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Gemma Bailey
Oakfield Lodge School
Warmingham Road
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 4PP

Dear Ms Bailey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oakfield Lodge School

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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:

- improve pupils' attendance at key stage 4
- broaden the curriculum by providing opportunities for pupils to learn history and geography
- ensure that the improvements in pupils' attitudes to learning seen in key stage 3 develop more consistently in key stage 4
- ensure that those responsible for governance publish the correct information about their roles on the school's website.

Evidence

During my visit I met with you, the assistant headteacher and various members of staff. I also met with a group of pupils in key stage 3 and talked informally throughout the day with other pupils. I met with two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. I met with two members, including the chair, of the management committee, which is the responsible authority. I met with the school's privately commissioned school improvement partner. I spoke on the telephone to another provider of external support. I examined a variety of documentation, including the school's improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, curriculum plans and documents connected with safeguarding. You and I carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at pupils' work in English, food technology and art. I also looked at a selection of pupils' books in Years 8 to 11.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have appointed permanent members of staff to replace the agency staff who were in place previously. The completion of the new building has been delayed, but is due before the end of the autumn term 2019.

Main findings

You and other leaders have drawn up a suitable plan of action to address the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. It is sufficiently detailed, and you regularly evaluate what you have achieved. There is clear evidence that this plan is helping to bring about the required changes.

You and your senior leaders have developed improved methods to check that staff are implementing the curriculum effectively. You have used expertise from local schools where good practice exists to support your work in this. Subject leaders carry out checks on the quality of the curriculum through, for example, visits to classrooms and looking at pupils' work. They now have a better overview of what pupils need to learn and when.

You have broadened the curriculum since the last inspection. You have thought carefully about meeting the needs of all pupils. There is now a focus on developing positive attitudes to learning with the 'nurture curriculum' in key stage 3. This enables these pupils to engage more readily with the subjects now on offer. This approach is not used in key stage 4, but you plan to extend it.

More subjects are available, including for pupils who stay on to Year 11. These include English and mathematics at both GCSE and functional skills. Food technology is now in place, as well as lessons in preparation for adulthood. You do your best to provide subjects that interest and are suitable for individual pupils. However, the curriculum is not as broad as it could be, as history and geography are not routinely taught in the school.

Subject leaders now ensure that there is more depth and demand to the work given to pupils in the subjects taught. This is particularly true in mathematics and art.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who do not have an education, health and care plan now benefit from improved support. New procedures for assessing pupils when they start at the school enable staff to plan carefully for their learning needs.

There has been a focus on improving pupils' literacy skills. The subject leader for English has introduced a programme to accelerate the development of pupils' reading. I heard examples of confident reading during my visit to lessons, which indicated that this programme is starting to contribute to improvement in this area. The curriculum in English is better organised, making it clearer in terms of what pupils need to learn and in what order. For example, pupils in both key stages learn about different features of writing styles and then have the opportunity to apply them in their own work.

Samples of work that I saw showed that there are now increasingly high standards. For example, in mathematics in key stage 4, pupils study simple coordinates before moving on to do more complex work involving a range of graphs.

Teachers use assessment more effectively. They are better at analysing what pupils can do and where the gaps in learning are. They then plan work to address any misconceptions that pupils may have.

You have adopted a range of approaches to improving attendance, which are starting to have a positive impact in key stage 3. The new 'nurture curriculum', for instance, encourages pupils to engage with their learning more positively. This contributes substantially to pupils' greatly improved attendance when compared to their previous school. You have also commissioned extra education welfare support from the local authority. This enables you to challenge parents and carers about their child's absence. You send prompt communications to raise concerns or organise meetings to discuss the reasons for unacceptable rates of absence. Attendance in key stage 4 is still not as high as it could be.

New expectations of behaviour, with a clear system of rewards and sanctions, have substantially reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions compared to the situation at the previous inspection. There are no permanent exclusions. Higher expectations of pupils' work also contribute to this improved picture.

You have brought about improvements to pupils' personal development by a revised approach to developing spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their education. Regular sessions with newly established form tutors enable pupils to engage in activities such as discussions about moral issues or to consider matters like mental health. You have also introduced a programme of whole-school assemblies to support this work.

The management committee, which is responsible for governance, holds you and your leaders to account more effectively. Evidence from discussions with members of the committee and from minutes of meetings shows that they ask you searching questions about a range of issues. These include finance, pupils' behaviour and the impact of improvements on developing pupils' literacy. Committee members are clear about the school's priorities and have ensured prompt actions to bring about the improvements that have taken place to date.

An evaluation of the school's website revealed that the required information about those responsible for governance was incomplete. However, there are some technical issues in this matter because you are in the process of upgrading the website. You have undertaken to publish the necessary details as soon as possible.

Safeguarding is effective. The school's policy is up to date. The required checks on staff are carried out and recorded properly on the school's central record. All events that take place off the school premises are thoroughly risk assessed to ensure that pupils are safe. Pupils that I spoke with said that they feel safe in school. They also said that they feel confident that adults will deal with any worries that they may have.

External support

An adviser from a local teaching alliance has provided support to enable you to apply successfully for improvement funding from the Department for Education. She has ensured that you and your senior leaders remain focused on delivering the planned improvements to the school.

The local authority has provided effective support. This has enabled you to access resources, such as opportunities for pupils to work with animals, to improve the breadth of the curriculum you provide. It has also contributed considerably to the improvement that you have secured so far in pupils' attendance in key stage 3.

The school improvement partner that you commissioned meets with you regularly to review leaders' work. This has made a positive contribution to the improving standard of pupils' work that is now evident.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, 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

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector