

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Craig Dillon
Executive Principal
Sheffield Park Academy
Beaumont Road North
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S2 1SN

Dear Mr Dillon

Short inspection of Sheffield Park Academy

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 2017 with Matthew Sammy, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your strong, determined leadership has ensured that the school builds on the successes outlined in the previous inspection. Your school self-evaluation is refreshingly honest and accurate. You are justifiably proud of the achievements of your pupils. However, you will not allow any complacency. You are working hard, for example, to ensure that progress in English accelerates and the support of the trust and their subject specialists will be important in this work. You are equally determined to see a situation where White British boys make similar progress to other groups in the school.

The governing body is experienced and ambitious for the pupils of the school. Governors have appropriate education and business backgrounds, which have enabled them to provide real support and challenge for school leaders. Minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate high levels of astute challenge to leaders. Governors have drilled down into key areas for improvement in the school, such as English, the level of exclusions and the outcomes of the most able. As a result, leaders, including governors, have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. The trust adds another effective layer to this support and challenge with its termly reviews of progress, its reviews of teaching and learning and the work of its subject specialists.

You have taken action to respond to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. You were asked to improve the sixth form and your work in that area has had real impact. You have responded to each point raised and been thorough in your approach. As a result, attainment, achievement and the numbers of learners completing their courses have all improved. Most learners still follow vocational courses, but the number following academic courses is increasing. Outcomes for the sixth form have improved steadily and are now broadly in line with national figures.

You were also asked at the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that all pupils are stretched and challenged. Staff now challenge all abilities, including the most able pupils, in lessons. Your most-able pupils across all year groups were interviewed and they were unanimous in the view that the school now caters well for their needs as able pupils.

Behaviour in the school is good. There is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in both classrooms and around the school. The increase in pupil numbers has put pressure on the system at key times, when pupils are moving from one classroom to another. You are very conscious of the crowded stairways and corridors at such times and pupils give this as an example of something they would like to change in their school. However, we saw on our inspection that you are testing various ideas to alleviate this situation and have already had some success.

Pupils are proud of their school and wanted to talk to inspectors and explain why they think it is a good school. They talked about the strong support they receive and the way teachers push them not only to hit their target, but to go beyond it. They particularly appreciated the way teachers are prepared to give of their time freely, running after-school, holiday and Saturday morning classes. However, you realise that you have not won over the hearts and minds of a minority of pupils. This is clear from the number of pupils who have been excluded. You agree that the number is too high and are working to reduce the number of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders are proactive in their approach and are timely in their interventions to ensure that pupils are safe.

Pupils say they feel safe in all areas of the school and clearly appreciate the strong staff presence around the campus. They have confidence in school staff to help them resolve any issues which arise. They receive extensive training on potential dangers and, consequently, they can speak confidently about measures they can take to keep themselves safe. Older pupils, in discussions, could see clearly how their training had developed and was age-appropriate.

Staff receive high-quality training and support. As a result, they are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and know what they have to do if they have a concern. Furthermore, they have confidence in leaders to take appropriate action. Governors are also well trained and fulfil their responsibilities thoroughly.

The checks made on new staff are rigorous. The single central record complies with requirements, and is well managed and efficiently used. Appropriate recruitment procedures are in place.

Inspection findings

- There are comprehensive systems in place to monitor pupils' progress. Leaders use this information to tailor specific interventions to the needs of any pupil who is falling behind. As a result, pupils make good progress. Indeed, pupils who left the school in 2016 made progress in line with the top 10% of schools nationally. Early analysis of the provisional 2017 results shows good progress overall and an improvement for the most able pupils. However, you were disappointed by the progress made by pupils in English.
- In learning walks with a senior leader, inspectors saw at first hand, across a range of subjects, how leaders have responded to the points about teaching and learning in the previous inspection report. Pupils know which 'step' they are on and do tasks appropriate to that level. There was even greater clarity in mathematics, where the steps were colour coded. Teachers encourage pupils to aim high. It was particularly evident in a middle-ability mathematics lesson how swiftly pupils move on to more challenging work. It was also encouraging to see every pupil at least hitting their target on a challenging piece of work in a top set mathematics lesson and half of the class exceeding it.
- There is a strong, well-established system of professional development in the school. Working with trust and local schools and teaching alliances, the school has developed a wide range of training packages. This bespoke model of training is important in developing the considerable number of new teachers, recruited to cater for the increased number of pupils.
- Historically, there were tensions between different areas in the community where the school is situated. Furthermore, there are a wide range of different cultures in the school. Leaders work hard to get involved in community projects. It is a tribute to the efforts of leaders that there is such a harmonious atmosphere in the school and that tolerance and the acceptance of diversity are at its very heart.
- You also have worked hard to raise the aspirations of the most able pupils. As a result, the most able pupils can see opportunities for education and careers beyond their local community. In discussions that inspectors held with some of your most able Year 11 pupils, it was clear that many had clear, precise plans to study A levels and then go to university.
- Teachers described staff morale as high. There is a real emphasis on working together as a team and this has resulted in a coherent and happy staff. They feel well supported by leaders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategies to reduce the number of exclusions continue to develop and become embedded
- they continue to focus on the performance of White British boys so that they make the same progress as other groups in the school
- they continue to work with the trust to support and challenge leaders and teachers of English, so that pupils make the same good progress in English as they do in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

David Pridding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and some of your middle leaders, governors and pupils. I had a telephone conversation with the regional director of United Learning. We gathered a range of evidence from conducting observations of learning and from scrutinising pupils' work jointly with your middle and senior leaders. The inspection team checked and evaluated documents, including your website, child protection policy, safeguarding records, school self-evaluation, school improvement plans, attendance and behaviour information and minutes from governors' meetings.