

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Peter Gillett  
Headteacher  
Hertswood Academy  
Cowley Hill  
Borehamwood  
Hertfordshire  
WD6 5LG

Dear Mr Gillett

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Hertswood Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 16 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the chair and vice chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the chief executive officer of the Meller Educational Trust. I also met with two groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4, as well as students from the sixth form. The school's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

I visited a number of lessons across a range of subjects and looked at the work in pupils' books. I reviewed a range of school documentation relating to behaviour and attendance and considered the school's curriculum. I also checked the school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff.

## **Context**

Construction of the new school building is under way, and temporary purpose-built accommodation is being used until the new building opens in September 2019. The school is involved in discussions about becoming part of the Meller Educational Trust.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

Leaders and governors responded quickly to the findings of the previous inspection report by producing a statement of action and a strategic school improvement plan. The statement of action, although already previously being judged as fit for purpose, has since been further amended to sharpen procedures for monitoring and for measuring success on an ongoing basis. Your review of actions taken so far shows that many have been completed and others are well under way. The improvement plan is suitably concise, and ties in closely with your statement of action.

You have now appointed a full-time attendance officer. This member of staff works diligently to follow up on any pupils who are absent, and whose absence has not been accounted for. Effective use is made of SMS messaging and/or telephone calls when parents or carers have not contacted the school to discuss the reason for any absence. She rightly prioritises disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities when making these calls. You still encounter challenges in engaging with some of the more hard-to-reach parents. Therefore, you have also appointed a counsellor who works with certain families with the aim of supporting them in getting their children to come to school more regularly. Communications with pupils' feeder primary schools have improved. Your 'continuum coordinator' visits all feeder primary schools and meets with some parents. You are now better informed about pupils who may have a history of poor attendance in their primary school. This enables you to put supportive measures in place before a pupil joins the school in Year 7. You offer all pupils in the school a free breakfast. Of those who take up this offer, 53% are pupils who are disadvantaged.

You have halted the decline in pupils' attendance and there has been a slight improvement. You acknowledge, however, that pupils' attendance must improve at a more rapid rate than at present. You have had greater success in reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, including those who are disadvantaged or who have SEN and/or disabilities. In fact, you have already met your target for June and need to readjust this. You recognise pupils who attend school more regularly, including those who previously had very low levels of attendance, through a rewards system. Pupils told me that the importance of attendance, and its impact on academic progress, is regularly referred to in their assemblies, in displays around the school and in your newsletter to parents, 'Hertsbeat.'

Your electronic registration system allows you to establish whether a pupil has arrived at school, and also whether they have attended each lesson. Teachers use this system to identify whether a pupil who does not appear to their lesson was present in the previous one. Teachers are clear that if a pupil's whereabouts are unaccounted for, they should communicate this immediately to a member of the senior leadership team. Any pupil who has to leave a classroom for any reason must carry an exit permit with them at all times.

You have had mixed success in addressing the high level of exclusions identified in the previous inspection report. You have successfully reduced the number of pupils who are excluded compared to the previous year by one third, and the total number of exclusion days has also reduced by a similar degree. The number of exclusions has reduced less rapidly. This suggests that you are having less success in dealing with pupils who are repeatedly excluded. You have wisely developed your 'refocus room' to enable staff to work more productively with pupils who are at risk of exclusion or who return to school following an exclusion. A restorative justice programme is in operation which encourages pupils to reflect on their behaviour and to make things right.

You have considered your curriculum offer to some of your more vulnerable pupils with a view to making it more accessible, which in turn helps them see the value of their education and the importance of attending school regularly. You have identified a small group of pupils who receive a more bespoke curriculum, targeting them through literacy, numeracy and life skills. The attendance of these pupils who are in Years 7 and 8 has already improved as a result of this. The aim of this curriculum offer is to equip them with the necessary skills so as to reintegrate them back into the main school when they are ready. You also offer a choice of approaches to pupils in order for them to gain suitable qualifications, including both academic and vocational qualifications.

You commissioned a headteacher who was qualified to carry out a review of your pupil premium expenditure. This involved observing disadvantaged pupils in lessons, reviewing the work in their books and meeting with them in small discussion groups. The pupil premium plan was finalised in February and the reviewer continues to visit the school to monitor progress being made against the actions in the plan. The plan rightly links disadvantaged pupils' progress to their attendance. One of your key aims is to raise the aspirations of disadvantaged pupils in the school, who comprise around 30% of your number on roll. You have consciously enhanced the quality of careers education in light of this. You have purchased various resources to implement this aspect of the plan and are enlisting the use of external speakers, guiding pupils towards apprenticeships and working productively with local businesses and employers.

The school's governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The vice chair monitors the delivery of the statement of action and has

carried out a number of monitoring visits to look for leaders' impact in raising levels of attendance. The chair of the governing body oversees exclusions. He informed me that the structure of the school day is set to change from September 2018, with no transition time between lessons and a shorter lunchtime. The rationale for this is to reduce the possibility of pupils becoming distracted, and to avoid any deterioration in behaviour as lunchtime draws to a close.

In preparation for this inspection, I took account of four qualifying complaints made to Ofsted which raised wider issues around the leadership and management of the school, and pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. In the school, I met with two groups of pupils who told me they feel safe and that the staff have their interests at heart. They acknowledge that bullying does take place, but also confirmed that they feel able to approach any member of staff to report such incidents, and that they are confident any reported incidents would be dealt with to their satisfaction. Your own records of incidents relating to bullying show that bullying is a rare occurrence in the school. School leaders presented case studies of incidents relating to the welfare of pupils. These showed that the school follows its own procedures and notifies any external agencies when it needs to do so. My meeting with a representative of the local authority also confirmed this to be the case.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**