

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 July 2018

Miss Kate Morris
Acting Headteacher
Wolsingham School
The Grammar School Building, West End
Wolsingham
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
DL13 3DJ

Dear Miss Morris

Short inspection of Wolsingham School

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 2018 with Julie McGrane, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your calm and measured approach serves the whole school community well. You and your acting deputy headteacher have a strong understanding of your areas of responsibility. As a consequence, other leaders have clarity and work alongside you to promote the well-established high expectations that are evident across the school.

The school is a calm, clean and orderly environment. Pupils are very happy at school and they wear their uniform with pride. Routines are clearly in place, and pupils are punctual, prepared and ready to learn. The house system provides pupils with beneficial opportunities to work with and learn from pupils in other year groups and students in the sixth form. As a result, pupils feel part of a unique school community and enjoy the rewards, incentives and competitions that the house system offers them.

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have maintained a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching across the school. Staff are well supported to improve and share good practice through well-planned and focused professional development opportunities. Staff appreciate these opportunities and, as a result, teaching continues to improve and staff morale is high.

You, supported ably by your leadership team, including governors, and staff, are committed to raising aspirations for all pupils. Pupils are increasingly aware of the

range of opportunities available to them. For example, pupils speak fondly and enthusiastically about the range of sporting, music and leadership opportunities in which they can engage, particularly the cadet schemes. Such opportunities are enhancing the school curriculum by developing pupils' personal and social skills, and raising their aspirations for their future. Sixth-form students' personal development and welfare needs are also met through a range of planned activities to engage them with local employers, business, apprenticeships and universities. As a result, students are well prepared for their future choices. Sixth-form students are positive role models for younger pupils in the school.

Governors have an insightful understanding of the school and the challenges it faces. They have made well-informed, yet difficult, decisions but are resolute in their passion and determination for the pupils who attend the school to succeed and get the best possible education.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders, including governors, carry out your safeguarding responsibilities diligently. You have all ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained in safeguarding and child protection issues and processes. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about how to identify vulnerable pupils and what to do should a concern arise. Governors are well aware of their responsibilities to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They do so with due care and attention. Staff in Wolsingham School really care about the safety and welfare of pupils.

Pupils feel safe in the school. They receive appropriate advice through the school's curriculum and assembly programme. As a consequence, they can explain how to stay safe in various situations, including when using social media, and also what to do if they have concerns about a situation or a friend. Pupils are confident that if they share a concern or worry with a member of staff, it will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils acknowledge that sometimes bullying takes place; however, they are confident that staff deal with it well. Most parents and carers believe that their children are safe at school, happy and well looked after.

Most pupils attend school regularly and this reflects their enjoyment of school. Overall, attendance is slightly above average, as a consequence of leaders' concerted efforts to ensure that pupils attend school well, particularly disadvantaged pupils. Incidents of poor behaviour are managed well and pupils report that poor behaviour does not, in the main, disrupt their learning and progress in lessons.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching by making sure that teachers had consistently high expectations of pupils and challenge them in their learning. Staff are clear about the high expectations you and other leaders have of them. As a result, teaching

is improving at a marked pace. Teachers are encouraged to be creative in their teaching and regularly use resources that meet the needs of individual pupils. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson, pupils were using well-structured resources to recall and apply concepts in preparation for their examinations.

- Teaching is routinely characterised by effective questioning. Questioning is used skilfully, and probes and extends pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, in Year 13 English literature, students were effectively questioned so that they could present a balanced argument about a feminist approach to a text.
- Staff have benefited from effective professional development. For example, this has provided staff with opportunities to discuss and share good practice, so that activities present greater challenge to pupils. This provides them with opportunities to explore their learning and think deeply about different ideas and concepts. However, despite the many strengths in teaching, you and other leaders agree that sometimes pupils are not challenged enough in their learning, and therefore this remains a priority for the school.
- You were also asked to improve middle leaders' checks on the quality of teaching. Middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They understand the importance of their role in checking on and improving the quality of teaching in their departments. New appointments have further strengthened the effectiveness of middle leadership in the school. For example, a new science leader has instilled a clear vision and direction of travel in her team and, as a result, the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils have markedly improved. More pupils are benefiting from studying separate science subjects and this has brought about an increase in the proportion of students studying biology at A level.
- Middle leaders are now highly effective in checking the quality of teaching in their department areas. They use the effective systems in place to great effect, so that pupils' experiences are of a consistently high quality. Where there are any issues, which are few, these leaders intervene swiftly in order to offer colleagues appropriate support and guidance to improve. Middle leaders are now playing an important role in continuing to drive up standards.
- The achievement of boys and disadvantaged pupils was also an area of focus for this inspection, because progress by the end of key stage 4 for these groups of pupils has been too variable. You rightly identify in your school self-evaluation that the progress of these groups of pupils needs to improve. As a result of your and other leaders' efforts, the progress of these groups of pupils is showing steady improvement. This is particularly the case for boys. As a result, the gap between boys and girls is reducing.
- You and your acting deputy headteacher have a sharp eye on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. A strategic approach benefits you, other leaders and governors so that funding is spent well.
- Leaders are aware of pupils' individual barriers and you have ensured that staff are aware of the specific needs of pupils. As a result, when pupils underachieve, interventions are swift. They have had some impact on improving pupils' rates of progress and levels of attainment, particularly for current Year 11 pupils. The

quality of work in pupils' books shows very little difference in the understanding and knowledge between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, because of your candid and accurate analysis of pupils' assessment information, you recognise that the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils are not improving as rapidly as you would like.

- During the inspection, I wanted to check how well the curriculum was meeting the needs of pupils and enabling them to achieve well over time, and fulfil their future aspirations. The information, advice and guidance that pupils receive in the school are significant strengths. They have access, for example, to careers fairs and talks from local employers and businesses, universities and apprenticeship providers. As a consequence of this work, pupils' aspirations are consistently high. The proportion of pupils who go on to education, employment and training is slightly above the national average. This well-thought-out curriculum is contributing to positive attitudes to learning and improved outcomes for different groups of pupils, although you continue to be concerned about middle prior attaining pupils. Nonetheless, as a result of your actions, the curriculum provides pupils with access to a wide range of relevant and appropriate courses that meet their individual needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue their work to embed improvements in the quality of teaching, particularly so that all pupils are challenged more in their learning
- pupils' outcomes continue to be sustained and further improve, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with middle prior attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with a group of governors. The inspection team observed pupils' learning in different lessons in the main school and the sixth form. All of this learning was observed jointly with you or other senior leaders. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school. They spoke with pupils informally and met formally with a group of Year 7 and 8 pupils, a group of Year 9 and 10 pupils and a separate group of Year 12 students. In addition, inspectors

completed various, detailed work scrutinies to gauge pupils' progress and learning over time. Inspectors considered a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, teaching and learning.

Inspectors also considered the views of 82 parents given on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 62 free-text responses. Inspectors also took into account the 50 staff responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire. No pupils completed their online questionnaire.