

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Michael Applewhite
Headteacher
William de Ferrers School
Trinity Square
South Woodham Ferrers
Chelmsford
Essex
CM3 5JU

Dear Mr Applewhite

Short inspection of William de Ferrers School

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 2018 with John Constable and Paul Lawrence, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The previous inspection report asked leaders to raise achievement in the sixth form to support students moving into higher education. Since then, the progress of students on vocational courses in the sixth form has been good. On A-level courses, students' progress steadily improved between 2015 and 2017 and students achieved well. While there was a dip in outcomes in 2018, you and other leaders have acted quickly to rectify this, and students in the sixth form now are making good progress in their A-level studies.

The proportion of students leaving the sixth form and going into education, employment or training is consistently above average. This includes the proportion of students going into higher education. Your work to improve the sixth form provision has been effective.

You and other leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You reflect on what works well and what could be improved. For example, your work to improve boys' achievement has led to a more structured approach to answering questions in history. This has improved boys' attainment in this subject. Your changes to the curriculum have led to an increase in the proportion of pupils undertaking the subjects which make up the English Baccalaureate. In the past, uptake of these subjects was low. Your evaluation of

provision enables you and other leaders to make appropriate changes to continue improving the school.

Another area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection was the level of challenge in key stage 3 work. You have subsequently changed the curriculum and built in higher expectations for what pupils in key stage 3 should achieve. While this underpins generally good teaching, teachers do not consistently base the work they set for pupils on their assessment of what pupils already know and can do. This means that, while pupils do make typically good progress in key stage 3, the most able are not routinely challenged to do as well as they could.

Governance is undertaken by trustees, known in the school as governors, and members of the trust. They bring with them a range of relevant experience such as in safeguarding, education and leadership. They have a strong understanding of how the school is developing. They value the work you and other leaders do, and are pleased with the improvements they see in the school.

Trustees and members of the trust are clear about their role in holding you and other leaders to account. For example, they ask challenging questions about appropriate topics during meetings and seek evidence of the impact of your work. Trustees and members of the trust work well with leaders in improving the school. For example, they support your work to celebrate pupils' successes by attending school events and writing to pupils who have done well. The work of the trust is integral to the success of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders of safeguarding have clear and well-kept records. They follow up concerns promptly and work with external agencies when required to secure pupils' well-being. Leaders ensure that staff training is kept up to date. They understand and address the issues which might affect pupils at this school. This is reflected in the views of pupils who spoke with inspectors. They told us that they are taught about online safety, for example, and told us they have someone they can talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors wanted to establish if the school's current pupils are making good progress across the curriculum. In particular, we wanted to establish if disadvantaged pupils were making good progress and if pupils were making good progress in science. This was because, in recent years, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been below the national average. The progress of pupils in science has also been low. Provisional 2018 key stage 4 outcomes indicate a drop in the Progress 8 performance measure, which shows how much progress pupils have made across a range of subjects.
- You have made changes to the way in which science is led. Leaders have reviewed the science courses that are taught and raised expectations of what

pupils should achieve. Most pupils now study three separate sciences. Teachers now follow schemes of work which support pupils in their learning, and most teaching is effective. Pupils are typically interested in the work they do and they are confident to attempt the challenges they are set.

- Leaders put extra help in place for disadvantaged pupils when they fall behind. For example, you and other leaders have arranged for one-to-one teaching for some pupils in mathematics. In addition, longer term strategies are beginning to bear fruit, such as the additional literacy support provided through key stage 3. This is having a positive impact. Your work to support disadvantaged pupils is successful and their progress has increased.
- Across the school, pupils generally make good progress. The weaker performance in 2018 resulted from a range of factors, including many pupils not being entered for the full range of qualifications which make up the Progress 8 measure. You have rectified this and pupils now experience an appropriate range of subjects. There were also changes to staffing in some subjects which affected the consistency of the quality of teaching. This has now largely been resolved.
- While progress across the school is now typically good, there remains some inconsistency in the quality of teaching, including in science, and in the progress pupils make in some classes.
- Inspectors wanted to establish if leaders had addressed the rise in pupils' absence rates. This has shown an upward trend in recent years. Leaders are aware of this issue and have recently put in place a range of strategies to improve attendance. However, it is too early to see the impact of these strategies. Reducing absence is an ongoing priority for the school.
- Our final line of enquiry was to establish if behaviour and bullying are well managed. An initial review of Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, before inspectors visited the school indicated dissatisfaction with this aspect of provision.
- There have been significant changes to leadership over recent years, including to the way in which behaviour is managed. These changes have been poorly received by some staff and some parents. During the inspection, further responses were added to Parent View with a significant proportion of these being negative, especially about the management of behaviour and bullying. Some staff shared these views in their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors' evidence did not support these negative perceptions. Behaviour in lessons is typically good. Pupils usually work well and respond properly to teachers' requests. Around the school, pupils generally conduct themselves appropriately. Pupils we spoke with told us that bullying is rare and that, if it happens, they are confident adults will deal with it effectively. They told us that it is a welcoming school where people who, for example, are gay, or who have different backgrounds or beliefs to their own, are treated with equal respect.
- Leaders and governors are already working well to improve the perceptions some staff have of the leadership of behaviour. However, while inspectors' evidence about behaviour and bullying was positive, there is still a need to improve the perceptions a number of parents have about this aspect of provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching is at a consistently high standard so that pupils make strong progress in all classes, including in science
- more challenge is provided to support the most able pupils in key stage 3 to achieve as well as they could
- strategies to improve attendance are well implemented so that absence rates fall
- they improve the way in which they work with parents to ensure that parents have a positive view of the school, particularly with regard to the management of behaviour and bullying.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors spoke with you, other leaders and five trustees. We visited parts of 49 lessons, sometimes accompanied by leaders, and reviewed pupils' work in their books. Inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding arrangements. We reviewed minutes of governing body meetings and the school's information about attendance and behaviour.

Inspectors considered the 107 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 93 responses from parents to the free-text option. We also considered the 54 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils during their breaktime and lunchtime to hear their views.