

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



22 January 2019

Mr Phillip Evans
Headteacher
Leek High School
Springfield Road
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6EU

Dear Mr Evans

Short inspection of Leek High School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2019 with Robert Bourdon-Pierre, 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 second short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, standards in the school have declined. Outcomes in 2017 were below average. Although outcomes in 2018 showed small signs of improvements, they remained significantly below national averages in a range of subjects such as English, science and humanities. This was particularly so for disadvantaged pupils, who make up approximately a quarter of your school's population.

Following your appointment as headteacher, you and other leaders have demonstrated a determination to bring about a change in culture and raise pupils' aspirations. As a result of the decline in standards, you are implementing focused and effective action plans to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. This work is beginning to show tentative signs of a positive effect. Behaviour and teaching are improving and the school is a calm and orderly learning environment.

However, challenges still remain. You are aware of them and are tackling them methodically and with a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement. You acknowledge that standards have declined in the past, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Your improvement strategies are a work in progress, but some impact is already evident, especially the improving quality of teaching and

behaviour of pupils. Nevertheless, it is too early to see the impact your actions are having on raising pupils' achievement and bringing their progress in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

Pupils enter the school with well below average prior attainment and weak literacy skills. Pupils have large gaps in subject knowledge across a wide range of subjects in the curriculum. There are some strategies in place to address weak literacy skills but their impact on standards is inconsistent, however. Pupils' work continues to show too many examples of common spelling and grammar errors. The quality of teaching in some subjects, especially in science, humanities and languages, is not yet sufficiently strong enough to close pupils' gaps in knowledge. As a result, pupils do not make the progress they should.

Pastoral care remains a strength of the school. Staff know pupils well and pupils trust their teachers. Relationships are respectful throughout the school. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning and they behave well. Although still above the national average, fixed-term exclusions have decreased sharply. Staff agree that behaviour is improving.

Parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, raised some concerns about the behaviour of pupils. However, during the inspection, inspectors saw no evidence of poor behaviour. The school's pastoral 'Hub' records show that more pupils are now disciplined in school rather than being excluded. This practice is effective as pupils continue to receive an education, which might not be the case were they excluded for a fixed period of time. However, some parents do not understand fully the new routines at the school.

Pupils' attendance is not good enough. You have introduced a range of strategies to ensure that pupils attend more regularly and miss less time from their education. Although beginning to show signs of improvement, the number of pupils persistently absent from school remains too high.

The school's work to inform pupils of the options for their next steps in education is effective, both in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. Pupils and students benefit from a wide range of career advice and guidance which help them to make informed choices. As a result, pupils are prepared well for their next steps in education and/or the world of work.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all staff are aware of their responsibility to be vigilant on safeguarding. There is a strong safeguarding culture across the school. Staff receive regular child protection training paired with updates so that they are aware of pertinent issues, including local and new priorities such as online dangers and 'county lines'. Staff are clear about who to refer any concerns on to, and leaders deal with referrals appropriately, drawing upon external agencies when the need arises.

Pupils are and feel safe at school. Those who spoke to inspectors expressed a sound understanding of ways to keep themselves safe, including from online dangers. Pupils are very complimentary about the pastoral support that they receive when they need it.

Inspection findings

- Since you took up post, you have worked hard with other leaders to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes, with varying success. Overall in 2017, pupils made progress that was below the national average. In 2018, pupils made similar progress to those with the same starting points nationally. However, their progress in English, science, EBacc subjects and humanities, was significantly below the national averages. Disadvantaged pupils continued to make poor progress across the curriculum. This was, in part, because of some ineffective teaching in the past and pupils' gaps in knowledge. You have evaluated the reasons for this and have recently introduced improvement strategies to address underachievement. While there is clear evidence that the quality of teaching is improving, it is too soon to see an impact on pupils' outcomes.
- The quality of teaching is improving because the leadership of teaching is effective. Leaders know where strengths and weaknesses are and monitor the quality of provision well. When any underperformance is identified, leaders put focused and targeted plans in place to improve it. Teachers say that the training they receive helps them to become better practitioners. There are some pockets of excellent teaching practices within the school. For example, teaching in mathematics consistently leads to strong outcomes for pupils. Leaders do not yet routinely disseminate these strengths in teaching across the curriculum. At times, teachers do not plan tasks that meet the needs of the most able pupils. Tasks are often too easy for them or not designed to effectively stretch and challenge their thinking. When this happens, they become disengaged in their learning. Consequently, the most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders' evaluation of how well pupils are performing is at times skewed and overgenerous. Consequently, so is that of governors. This is because leaders disregard certain pupils from their progress information, for example those that have been placed on alternative provision but are still registered at the school. As a result, lines of clear accountability for pupils' performance are not possible and the checking of the validity of information then becomes less helpful to leaders, middle leaders, teachers and governors.
- The school's curriculum includes courses which prepare pupils well for their next steps. It offers a range of academic and vocational courses. Pupils are given support to make option choices based on their needs. They also benefit from the support of pastoral leaders and an effective personal development programme to make appropriate choices.
- The sixth form is growing in popularity, with more pupils choosing to stay on. Teaching in the sixth form is improving and students are very complimentary about the support they receive, both in lessons and pastorally. Students are polite and courteous and would recommend their sixth form to their younger

peers. Outcomes in the sixth form are variable, however. While students achieve well in a range of academic and vocational subjects, too few students continue their chosen courses into Year 13. Therefore, retention figures in the sixth form are not as positive as they should be. Not all students benefit from planned and structured work-related placement opportunities. You have recognised this and all Year 12 students will be completing work experience placements in the summer term of this academic year.

- Governance to your school is provided by the local governing board. Governors are dedicated to the school and bring a wealth of expertise to their roles. However, governors have an overgenerous view of the school's effectiveness. This is partly due to the way in which achievement information is shared with them. As a result, they are not always able to effectively hold leaders to account for low outcomes for pupils, especially disadvantaged and most-able pupils. Governors are very clear about the school's finances and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are met fully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievement information is used more effectively and includes all pupils on the school roll to ensure that there is a clear line of accountability
- improvement strategies are embedded fully and evaluated to measure their impact on pupils' outcomes
- pupils miss less time from their education by being persistently absent
- teachers plan tasks that stretch and challenge the learning of the most able pupils
- a greater number of students complete their chosen courses after Year 12
- teachers embed effective literacy strategies across the curriculum, leading to better outcomes for pupils, including more accurate spelling and grammar.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, members of the combined leadership team and three governors, including the chair. We met informally with pupils and sixth

formers. We visited several classes with senior leaders and spoke with pupils about their learning and work. We scrutinised several documents, including the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding and child protection records and achievement information. Parents' views were considered through the 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Staff views were considered through the 28 responses from Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.