

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



22 February 2019

Mrs Sally Jones  
Sandymoor  
Wharford Lane  
Sandymoor  
Runcorn  
Cheshire  
WA7 1QU

Dear Mrs Jones

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Sandymoor**

Following my visit to your school on 6 February 2019, 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 February 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I assessed the impact of leaders' action taken since the previous inspection, with focus on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

I held meetings with you, the associate vice principal and two assistant principals. I also met with a group of middle leaders. I met formally with a group of pupils and a group of three trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees. I observed pupils learning and scrutinised their work across subjects. I also met with an executive principal from Ormiston Academy Trust (OAT) who is currently providing support to the school. This support was commissioned by the regional schools commissioner (RSC).

I discussed matters relating to safeguarding with school leaders. I also reviewed the

school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.

## **Context**

Following the publication of the inspection report in May 2018, a new chair of the board of trustees was appointed, and two new trustees joined the board. The senior leadership team has changed considerably since the previous inspection. The current acting principal replaced the previous principal in July 2018. Two new assistant principals were appointed, and one assistant principal has since become the associate vice principal.

There have also been several changes at middle-leadership level. New middle leaders have been appointed in mathematics, humanities and physical education. Since December 2018, two further middle leaders have been appointed. They will take up their posts in April 2019. Since the previous inspection, 19 teachers have left the school and a number of new teachers have been appointed across a range of subjects.

The first statement of action produced by leaders was deemed 'not fit for purpose' by the RSC in June 2018. The statement of action and the school improvement plan have since been redeveloped by the acting principal and the current senior leadership team.

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

Following the publication of the previous inspection report, trustees took decisive action. They acted to secure the necessary changes to the senior leadership team and several changes to staffing. The trustees bring relevant skills and knowledge to their roles. They demonstrate an accurate understanding of those aspects of the school that require further improvement. Trustees hold senior leaders to account more diligently for their actions than at the time of the previous inspection. The board of trustees is keen to challenge leaders more. To this end, a national leader for governance is working with trustees to improve further this aspect of the school's leadership.

You and the senior leadership team have an accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses. You have prioritised your actions effectively to address the areas identified at the previous inspection. The school improvement plan focuses on the areas that need to improve and builds upon the trust's statement of action. Leaders' proposed actions are clear, relevant and set within appropriate timescales. The persons responsible for leading and taking actions are identified. There are appropriate monitoring processes in place to check that leaders make the gains required towards measurable targets.

Support from the OAT has strengthened the school's leadership capacity at both

middle and senior leadership levels. Through the OAT, leaders have been able to benefit from relevant training. Experts work alongside leaders to improve aspects of the school. For instance, the school's assessment systems are now fit for purpose. There are effective procedures in place to check on pupils' progress across the school. Leaders ensure that the information that teachers provide is accurate. This means that teachers have access to reliable information about what pupils know already. Many teachers are using this information to plan learning that challenges pupils, for example in Spanish. Nonetheless, at times some teachers do not use this information effectively and plan learning that is too easy for pupils.

Outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2018 improved when compared with the year before. Pupils made better progress at key stage 4 in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics. This was also the case for disadvantaged pupils. However, because of a legacy of weak teaching, despite some improvement, pupils who left the school in 2018 underachieved considerably. This was especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are benefiting from support from external experts to improve further the quality of provision for pupils with SEND. Leaders' assessment information for current pupils shows that the progress made by pupils with SEND is improving.

A timely review of leaders' use of the pupil premium funding was carried out in May 2018. Leaders have been keen to learn from and act on the recommendations provided. For instance, leaders have put an action plan in place to improve this aspect of the school. This action plan includes clearly measurable targets and timescales. You have ensured that there are effective systems to check on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. These systems mean that leaders can check that their work to support disadvantaged pupils has a positive effect. The differences in the progress made by this group of pupils at the school and other pupils nationally are diminishing.

Leaders have made considerable changes to the systems they use to manage and check on pupils' attendance and behaviour. These changes have been particularly effective in improving the behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Since the previous inspection, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils excluded from the school has decreased markedly. This is because pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour benefit from highly effective support from staff. Pupils explained to me that behaviour around the school is generally 'very good'. Disadvantaged pupils also receive effective support to improve their attendance. Consequently, fewer disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school. This is having a positive effect on the progress that this group of pupils make.

You and your leadership team have high expectations of teachers. To ensure that the quality of teaching continues to improve, senior leaders have introduced more effective systems to monitor the quality of teaching. Leaders ensure that those teachers who require support to improve their teaching benefit from relevant training. The support from the OAT is providing teachers with access to more high-

quality professional development. Leaders' assessment information and work in pupils' books show that systems and support for teachers to improve the quality of teaching are effective. Improvements in the quality of teaching mean that current pupils are making greater gains in their learning than pupils in the past. This is especially the case for pupils in key stage 4.

Almost immediately following the previous inspection, you and the senior leadership team made several significant changes to the curriculum to ensure that it was fit for purpose. Pupils across all year groups now have access to careers guidance as part of the curriculum. The quality of the careers advice that pupils receive has been transformed. For example, pupils in Year 7 benefit from sessions on building their self-esteem and confidence with a view to identifying appropriate career paths and raising their aspirations. Pupils in Year 11 have access to independent careers advice. Pupils in younger year groups receive more effective support to help them to make informed subject choices at key stage 4. Leaders monitor the quality of careers information, education, advice and guidance. This ensures that pupils receive high-quality advice. Pupils are highly positive about the careers advice and guidance they receive. The proportion of pupils who moved on to further education, employment or training in 2018 was greater than the previous year and was above the national average.

As part of the changes leaders have made to the curriculum, they acted to make sure that pupils receive appropriate personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. For instance, pupils in Year 7 learn about how to look after their own physical and emotional health. As part of the PSHE education curriculum, pupils also learn about how to keep themselves safe. The leader for PSHE education checks on the quality of teaching in this subject. This ensures that teachers who require further support with their teaching in this subject can benefit from appropriate training.

The pupils who I spoke with during the inspection told me that they feel safe in the school. They explained to me how incidents of bullying are rare. They were confident that staff would deal effectively with any concerns or worries they may have.

School leaders, supported by the OAT, are taking effective action to improve the school. However, although effective systems have been implemented, some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. Leaders now need to embed systems and develop the quality of teaching further across the school.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory

**Her Majesty's Inspector**