

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



1 March 2019

Mrs Dionne Elliott
Headteacher
Nailsea School
Mizzymead Road
Nailsea
Bristol
Somerset
BS48 2HN

Dear Mrs Elliott

Short inspection of Nailsea School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2019 with Her Majesty's Inspector Gill Hickling, 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 June 2015.

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.**

You took up your post in September 2016 and have since developed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that need further development. For example, you have identified that the curriculum did not offer sufficient breadth for some pupils. Therefore, you have revised the curriculum so that it meets the needs and interests of pupils but ensures that there is a strong academic core. You have guided a greater number of pupils towards studying a wide range of subjects, including those that contribute to the English Baccalaureate. You have also focused on improving the quality of teaching as you accept that pupils do not make sufficient progress in some areas of the curriculum.

The recent changes that you have made to your senior leadership team have increased your capacity to hasten the speed of change. Senior leaders bring an energy and enthusiasm to their roles. They share the ambition to improve the areas of the school's work that are not where you would like them to be. The large majority of teachers, parents and carers, and pupils are highly supportive of the school. This has established a collective purpose and a positive culture on which to build.

Governors are highly committed and are now more knowledgeable about the

standard of education that the school provides. Their visits to the school are aligned to improvement planning priorities. These visits, together with the information provided by senior leaders, enable them to ask probing questions to support and challenge appropriately.

Governors do not seek to make excuses for decisions that have been made in the past, particularly concerning the curriculum offer. They do recognise that, although based on good intentions, these decisions have not supported pupils as well as they should. They also accept that their strategic understanding of the use of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up has not been sharp enough. They are resolute about remedying these issues. Like senior leaders, they acknowledge the enormous potential that the school has and are ambitious for all pupils.

You have also appointed new middle leaders, particularly in areas that you have identified as a priority. Subject leaders are now regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and are starting to reflect on how they can best raise standards within their departments. Where they are identifying gaps in pupils' understanding, middle leaders are adapting the sequence of learning so that pupils have solid foundations on which to build their knowledge and understanding.

However, the quality of middle leadership is not yet consistently good, and this is reflected in the inconsistencies that exist between departments and often within the same department. Crucially, middle leaders do not yet demonstrate a compelling understanding of their strategic importance in supporting senior leaders to achieve priorities. This is particularly evident in middle leaders' lack of secure awareness of the subject strategies that will better support disadvantaged pupils. Their understanding remains too heavily focused on pastoral issues rather than a tighter alignment to academic performance.

Since the last inspection, you have made improvements to ensure that teachers' knowledge of their subject is secure. In addition, the revised teaching and learning approach is focused on how teachers' guidance supports pupils to improve the quality of their work. Where this is done well, such as in English and humanities, there is a demonstrable improvement in the quality of pupils' written compositions. However, there is still too much variability, which means that, overall, the progress that pupils make is limited, particularly for the most able. This issue was identified in the previous inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The recently appointed designated safeguarding leader has made several effective changes to safeguarding procedures. Staff are aware of how to report concerns. The system now in place means that the sequence of referrals and actions is clear. However, at times, follow-up is not recorded in sufficient detail so that the resolution of actions can be evaluated more easily.

Leaders are conscientious in working with external agencies to support pupils who

are at risk. They have strengthened their expertise so that they can successfully support the emotional and mental well-being of pupils. Staff receive the relevant training, and plans are in place to use regular 'scenarios' to enhance this awareness further.

There is an effective culture of vigilance around safeguarding. There were, however, some administrative oversights in the single central register, about which leaders sought advice to rectify at the time of the inspection.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and this view is supported by the large majority of parents. Pupils say that bullying is rare and they are confident that staff will deal with issues when they arise. The 'Absolute Curriculum' covers elements that are important to pupils' understanding of their personal and social development. Pupils know how to recognise risk and how to keep themselves safe when online or using social media. They say that they are regularly encouraged to consider moral and ethical issues but are less confident in their understanding of the dangers posed by radicalisation and political extremism.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of this short inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on how effectively leaders ensure that the curriculum and the quality of teaching support pupils to maximise their potential. We particularly looked at the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the most able. Over the last three years, the progress that pupils make overall has been below national averages. However, this underachievement is particularly notable in the groups highlighted above. Partly, this is due to the nature of the curriculum that pupils follow. Nonetheless, even in subjects that pupils choose, they do not always make the progress that they should. In science and modern foreign languages, the progress that pupils make is weak.
- Leaders have identified some of the barriers that exist for disadvantaged pupils and have allocated additional funding to overcome these. The new senior leader who oversees this expenditure is developing approaches to meet the needs of this group more comprehensively. This includes improving the quality of the information that pupils receive to inform their future plans for education and employment. Leaders acknowledge that the use of this funding has not been strategic enough in the past. The impact of actions is not yet evaluated precisely enough within defined timescales.
- Teachers' use of assessment to support pupils' progress is developing. Where practice is good, pupils respond well to teachers' advice and demonstrably improve the quality of their compositions. In subjects such as English and humanities, pupils sustain their writing and are adept at writing in an analytical and evaluative way. Pupils show that they understand and can use subject vocabulary confidently.
- However, this is not consistently the case. Where teaching is not as assured, planning is not well matched to pupils' starting points. When given the choice,

pupils tend to opt for what is easier rather than select tasks of suitable challenge. In addition, assessment is not used well enough to provide clear and targeted guidance for pupils to improve their work. Where expectations are not high enough, pupils produce work which is underdeveloped and poorly presented. Often, the same pupil can demonstrate widely differing attitudes, illustrating a direct correlation with teachers' tenacity. This variability means that the most able pupils are not always challenged to extend their thinking and apply their understanding.

- The support for pupils with SEND has not been effective enough in the past. The appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator is a direct response to this. This decision has led to recent improvements in the support that pupils receive, both in subject areas and within the specialist provision, 'The Hub'. However, there are still examples of where the resources provided for pupils are not at the appropriate level of literacy. The strategic oversight is not yet secure and coherent enough.
- The second line of enquiry centred on how well leaders are promoting better behaviour and attendance. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the patterns of behaviour across the school. Relationships are strong and pupils' conduct, both in lessons and during social time, is purposeful and positive. They show respect for their environment. There has been a reduction in behavioural concerns across a three-year period as a result of a clear policy understood by staff and pupils. Leaders support pupils who find expectations difficult to manage. Governors are well informed and act to ensure that exclusion is used as a last resort.
- The rate of attendance continues to be a stubborn issue for leaders to overcome. For the last three years, overall attendance has been below the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. There are now better systems in place to tackle absence more stringently. The pastoral team carefully balances challenge with incentives which recognise where pupils have improved their attendance. However, while leaders are doing what they can to reinforce the importance of good attendance, the impact is, at present, modest, particularly for pupils who are persistently absent.
- The final line of enquiry considered how well the sixth form meets the needs of students. This is a developing strength of the school, which is reflected in the sharp improvement in the progress that students made, particularly at A level, in 2018. This is now significantly above national averages.
- Students are very positive about the quality of their study programmes, which are well matched to their needs. Students, particularly the most able, readily take the initiative in class discussion and are proactive in their response to teachers' guidance. They are clear about assessment objectives and the demands of their subjects. This means that they are well prepared and understand what they need to do to reach the highest standards. Students who enter the sixth form with lower prior attainment at GCSE also make sufficient progress. However, they do not always respond well enough to the guidance that teachers give so that the benefit is fully realised. Students receive age-appropriate advice to support their well-being and have opportunities to engage in work-related learning. As a result,

students are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements are consistently implemented and sustained so that teachers' practice is consistently strong across all subjects
- teachers routinely use assessment information to identify misconceptions and plan work that matches the learning needs of pupils, particularly the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
- leaders' self-evaluation is further developed so that the impact of actions is outlined with more precision, particularly in the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and for those who fall behind
- new leaders continue to develop their skills so that they can support the drive for rapid improvement
- leaders continue to stringently challenge pupils who do not attend school regularly.

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 North Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the beginning of the day, inspectors met with you and your leadership team to agree key lines of enquiry. Following this, we visited lessons with leaders and scrutinised pupils' written work across a range of subjects and age groups. We met with members of the leadership team, representatives from the governing body, curriculum leaders, pastoral managers and pupils. We also evaluated a range of documentation provided by the school, including policies relating to safeguarding. When making final judgements, we considered 186 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 83 responses to the staff questionnaire and 99 responses to the pupil questionnaire provided by Ofsted. An inspector also spoke on the telephone with a parent.