

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Dr Simon Letman
Headteacher
Holbrook Academy
Ipswich Road
Holbrook
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP9 2QX

Dear Dr Letman

Short inspection of Holbrook Academy

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019 with David Hutton, 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 October 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You, and the senior leaders, reflect carefully on the needs of the school community. The clear vision for its future is driven by a strong sense of moral purpose and commitment and you have identified accurately the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders' actions have led to pupils achieving better outcomes in recent years. Over the past three years, pupils' progress and attainment by the end of key stage 4 have been strong, particularly in English and mathematics.

Since the last inspection, you have seen the school grow in popularity and the number of pupils increase. You welcome the opportunity to educate more pupils at your school but acknowledge that this presents some challenges. For example, more pupils are travelling a distance from their homes, there are increased class sizes and there is greater pressure on the school facilities.

You are working determinedly with other leaders to address any weaknesses. Since the previous inspection, you have improved literacy and numeracy by investing in a new centre to support smaller groups of pupils to improve their reading, writing and mathematics skills. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive well-organised support in their education. Relative weaknesses that remain include outcomes for some disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 4, that are not as

good as for other groups in the school. In addition, while overall attendance has risen slightly, for some groups, it is below average. Governors support the changes you are making and offer a good level of challenge to school leaders. They share your determination to improve the school and acknowledge that the actions to increase pupils' attendance need to be more sharply focused.

Staff, parents and pupils typically agree that most pupils behave well. Good behaviour was apparent during the inspection. Almost all pupils worked well and interacted positively with their teachers and with each other. Last year, leaders introduced an isolation room and a course to improve the behaviour of pupils who regularly misbehave. Records show that visits to this room are rapidly decreasing and conduct in lessons has improved. Parents made appreciative comments about the school community and the range of support offered to their children. Pupils were similarly positive about the support given to them.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' well-being is a priority for the school. Pupils benefit from being able to access a wide range of support if they need to.

Staff understand the responsibilities they have to keep pupils safe because the training they receive is regular and appropriate. Adults know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. Staff work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils who need additional help receive it in as timely a manner as possible.

Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are safe and well cared for at Holbrook Academy. Pupils who spoke with us and who responded to Ofsted's online survey agreed. Inspection evidence supports their views.

While safer recruitment and child protection records are acceptable, they are not organised as systematically as they could be. Leaders and governors have recognised this and are taking steps to improve these procedures.

During the inspection, most pupils told us that bullying is infrequent and that teachers generally respond to it swiftly and effectively. This was consistent with pupils' responses to Ofsted's online survey and with the school's records.

Inspection findings

- Last year, disadvantaged pupils made similarly good progress to that made by other pupils nationally in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, their attainment in GCSE examinations was below that of other groups in the school.
- Work in books shows that the gap in attainment appears to be narrowing. Disadvantaged pupils told inspectors that they feel well supported. Leaders have greatly improved transition arrangements. Before admission to the school, the school creates a profile for each disadvantaged pupil. However, the pupil

premium funding is not linked closely enough to this profile to ensure that individual pupils receive the support that would help them to make stronger progress.

- In recent years, overall absence and the rates of persistent absence have been above average. This is particularly true for some disadvantaged pupils. This year there has been a reduction in overall absence but the absence of disadvantaged pupils has risen slightly.
- Leaders are making changes to the way they are monitoring and encouraging better attendance. For example, last year they introduced awards to acknowledge good attendance and gave school tutors the responsibility to work with pupils to improve. There are a number of examples of year groups and individuals whose attendance has improved as a result of these initiatives. However, the impact of this has been inconsistent, as some tutors prove less effective than others. Leaders have not established a universal understanding of why some groups of pupils do not attend often enough.
- We investigated whether the curriculum was broad enough to help pupils to achieve as much as they can. Although Holbrook is a small secondary school, it offers a range of subjects at both key stages that meet the needs of the school community. You have prioritised English and mathematics over the past few years but middle leaders report that, with improved literacy and numeracy, this focus has had a positive impact on their subjects. New courses like business studies, media and music technology are now part of the curriculum and are very popular with the pupils.
- Published information shows that quite a small proportion of pupils complete the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). This is essentially because too few pupils study a modern foreign language in key stage 4. Leaders recognise this and are encouraging more to take part. Those who do study a language make good progress. The school encourages all pupils to study French at key stage 3. Inspectors heard pupils, in both French and German lessons, converse with confidence and produce accurate written work in the language.
- Careers guidance and support is very helpful to pupils. Life skills and a tutor programme focus on developing self-awareness and citizenship. The school supports all pupils in making their optional choices at GCSE and all pupils receive a careers interview. Disadvantaged pupils receive additional career guidance to ensure that they are taking subjects in which they can achieve. You have also introduced a scheme to introduce pupils to a wider curriculum through a weekly enrichment afternoon. Although a few parents questioned the validity of this scheme, pupils were highly positive about the wide range of activities and clubs they could participate in.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they develop a better understanding of why some groups of pupils do not attend regularly, so that their actions can be more effective

- the use of pupil premium funding is linked to the profile of each disadvantaged pupil.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Herlock
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.

Inspectors met with other leaders, governors and teachers.

Documents such as the school's improvement plan, leaders' monitoring and analysis of the progress pupils make, records of their attendance and behaviour, pupil premium reports and the school's safeguarding arrangements, records and files were examined.

Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils and with others informally, during lessons, regarding their learning.

The views of 110 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those of the 26 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also taken into account. The 116 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire were also evaluated.