

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Susan Byles
Principal
Mildenhall College Academy
Bury Road
Mildenhall
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP28 7HT

Dear Mrs Byles

Short inspection of Mildenhall College Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2018 with Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Vivien Corrie-Wing, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Pupils achieve well across a range of subjects in both the main school and the sixth form. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is typically good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use this to plan sequences of learning that give pupils the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding and practise the application of subject skills. You rightly identify teaching in mathematics as a particular strength in the school. Pupils of all abilities can confidently use and apply their mathematical knowledge. They are well supported in the development of their reasoning skills.

Leaders' evaluation of the school's provision is accurate. You know which areas need to be improved to make the quality of education even better. For example, you are aware that pupils have not achieved as well as they should have in science and geography because of inconsistent and weaker teaching in the past. There are regular checks on the progress that pupils are making, including those who attend alternative provision. This information is used to identify any pupils who need extra help. Teachers know the key priorities for improvement and there are well-considered plans in place to achieve them. Staff share your ambition for the school and its pupils. They are proud to work at the school and feel well supported by you and the wider leadership team.

The local academy committee is actively involved in evaluating the work of the school and developing plans for improvement. They regularly check on the work of the school to make sure that progress is being made towards the targets that you have agreed. Members of the local academy committee have a wide range of skills that enable them to fulfil their roles effectively. They have a good understanding of the responsibilities delegated to them by the Academy Transformation Trust (ATT) and hold leaders to account well. The trust has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Subject networks and support are used to provide opportunities for teachers' professional development and to share ideas. This has strengthened leadership and ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and improving.

The trust recognises strengths in leadership in the school. You are acting as an executive leader for four other schools in the trust. The very able head of academy has taken on additional responsibilities in the school and has previously provided teaching and learning support for other schools in the trust. Your senior leadership team works effectively with middle leaders. There is an appropriate balance of support and challenge in their working relationships that helps maintain standards and bring about improvement when this is required.

Pupils appreciate the broad curriculum that supports their academic and personal development well. The large majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey feel that they get the right amount of information to help them to make informed choices about the next stage of their education, training or employment. Pupils welcome the wide variety of extra-curricular trips and activities that add to their experiences in lessons. They are proud of the school and their achievements.

You have acted to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers follow your agreed marking policy consistently. Pupils use teachers' guidance to improve the quality of their work and deepen their understanding. There are clear expectations regarding teachers' planning for pupils' individual needs. Regular checks on the quality of teaching identify where teachers need additional support to be able to do so. We agreed that there is a small minority of teachers who do not consistently plan activities that are appropriately challenging for all pupils. This is where there have been difficulties in recruiting teachers. There is a clear focus on developing pupils' literacy skills in your improvement plans. Leaders have rightly focused on supporting pupils to improve their spelling and broadening their vocabulary to improve the quality of their written work. Inspection evidence shows that this is having a positive impact on current pupils' progress and the quality of their written work in subjects other than English.

Pupils have a range of ways of sharing their views, including through the house and school councils, peer and staff mentors, form tutors and pastoral staff and a system where they can email their teachers if they are struggling with homework. Pupils' ideas contributed to the rewards and behaviour system that is used in the school. Your actions have addressed this area for improvement well. A large number of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that teachers listen to their

views and that they have someone they can go to if they have concerns. This was reflected by the views of pupils spoken with during the inspection.

The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, are positive about all aspects of the school. This includes the information they receive about the progress their children make, which was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. One parent's comment, that reflected the sentiments of many others, was: 'The school and its staff provide a caring environment. Although a fairly large school, it does not feel anonymous. You do not feel your child is just a number.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority in the school. The child protection policy is reviewed annually and was updated in September to reflect the most recently published statutory guidance. Leaders ensure that staff are trained and kept up to date with the latest guidance on keeping children and young people safe from harm. This includes training on the risks of extremism and radicalisation and about issues that are becoming of growing concern in the local area. Staff are able to recognise the signs that a pupil is at risk and are confident in referring any concerns to the highly knowledgeable designated safeguarding lead. Records of concerns are appropriately detailed and accurately maintained. Referrals are made to external agencies swiftly when required to ensure that pupils and their families quickly get the help that they need.

The local academy committee take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. They undertake regular safeguarding training and check that staff receive regular training. Members of the committee who have specific knowledge of safeguarding use this to check on, and contribute to, the school's work to keep pupils safe. The checks made to ensure that adults in the school are suitable to work with children are thorough and accurately recorded. The record of these checks is regularly reviewed by the trust to ensure that it meets statutory requirements, and trust staff ensure that the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, and they feel safe. They have a good understanding of the risks in modern society, including the risks of working online and using mobile technology. Pupils speak confidently about how they learn about topics such as healthy relationships, alcohol and drug misuse, and extremism and radicalisation in their skills for life lessons. Issues such as knife crime are covered in assemblies delivered by the police. Pupils know about the different forms of bullying and the harm that it can cause. They have confidence that teachers deal with incidents that occur swiftly, including incidents of cyber bullying, so that problems are nipped in the bud.

Inspection findings

- To determine that the leaders had maintained the quality of education provided by the school, inspectors explored several lines of enquiry.

- The first of these was whether current pupils make good progress across a range of subjects, including science and humanities. This was because in key stage 4, between 2015 and 2017, pupils' progress in humanities and science was well below the national average. Pupils had also made below average progress in English in 2015, but this had improved to be in line with the national average in 2016 and inspectors wanted to see if this improvement had been sustained.
- You have recruited teachers to fill vacancies in science and geography. Consequently, pupils have benefited from more stable staffing and a more consistent quality of teaching. You have not shied away from tackling issues of underperformance, and leaders have closely monitored the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, providing support when this has been needed.
- Your analysis of the most recent GCSE examinations shows that pupils have made much better progress in science. Observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work show that pupils currently in the school are making good progress in science because teaching is effective.
- Pupils' achievement in geography has also improved, but less so than in science. You acknowledge that current pupils' achievement in geography does not match their achievement in history. This is because teachers are not yet consistently focusing closely enough on developing the skills and depth of knowledge that pupils need to think like a geographer.
- The improvements made in English have been sustained and some groups made very strong progress in the recent GCSE examinations. Current pupils are making good progress in English because they are well supported to develop their reading and writing skills. Those who join the school with standards below those expected for their age are helped to catch up by effective support.
- The second line of enquiry was to explore whether teachers provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to pupils, particularly for the disadvantaged and the most able pupils. This was because the most able pupils had not made the progress that they should in some subjects by the end of key stage 4, including English, science and the humanities. The attainment of the most able students completing A-level courses in 2017 was below the national average for similar pupils. While the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been similar to that of other pupils nationally, their attainment has been lower than that of other pupils.
- Inspectors' observation of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that most groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress. This is because teachers know individual pupils well and plan sequences of learning that meet their needs. Inspectors saw that most teachers routinely plan interesting activities that provide different levels of challenge. Typically, pupils do not find the work too hard or too easy. They learn at a pace that is right for them and are fully engaged in their learning.
- There has been a specific focus on providing challenge for the most able pupils. This has had a positive impact on their outcomes. Attainment in A-level subjects has increased. The proportions of pupils attaining the highest grades in biology, chemistry and physics at the end of key stage 4 went up in 2018.

- Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that the most able pupils are continuing to make strong progress in mathematics and are now making strong progress in science and English. This is because teachers model the standards expected to achieve the highest grades.
- A small minority of teachers do not yet consistently provide all pupils with appropriately challenging work. Occasionally, they provide the same task for all pupils when it is not appropriate to do so. Some activities do not allow pupils to demonstrate fully the depth of their understanding. This is particularly, though not exclusively, true for the most able pupils.
- The final line of enquiry was to check whether improvements in attendance and the good standard of behaviour identified at the time of the previous inspection has been maintained.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. They arrive to lessons on time and ready to learn. They are polite, respectful and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils socialise sensibly and move around the school in an orderly, calm manner. At the end of the school day, pupils leave the building in a similarly calm and orderly manner. Leaders acknowledge, however, that pupils can be a little boisterous while waiting for the school buses to arrive at the end of the day. This behaviour does not reflect what is typical in the school.
- The school's information regarding rewards and sanctions indicates that behaviour is improving. Pupils understand what is expected of them, and they usually meet teachers' high expectations. They respond well to the system of rewards that is in place.
- Leaders' focus on eliminating low-level disruption has had a positive impact on reducing disruption to learning. Pupils say that disruption to learning is rare and that when it does occur teachers deal with it effectively.
- Similarly, a focus on reducing more serious behaviour incidents has been successful. You provide pupils with support to reduce the likelihood of these occurring. When incidents occur, you have introduced a system of restorative justice. This significantly reduced the number of events that led to pupils being excluded from school for a fixed period in 2017/18. No pupils were permanently excluded from school in 2017/18, which is an improvement on previous years. Your information for current pupils indicates that behaviour is continuing to improve.
- Attendance is above the national average and few pupils are frequently absent from school. This is due to the high profile given to promoting and monitoring attendance. You celebrate and reward high and improved attendance. Pupils are aware of the importance of being in school regularly. The message of 'attend every day – 95% minimum' is regularly reinforced to pupils and their parents. The attendance of children looked after is above that for all pupils in the school. However, persistent absence is higher than that of all pupils for a small group of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are working hard to continue to improve this and make pupils and their families aware of the link between high attendance and achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievement in geography continues to improve so that it matches that in history
- all teachers provide pupils, particularly the most able pupils, with challenging activities so that their progress continues to improve
- they improve the attendance of the small minority of disadvantaged pupils who are frequently absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with you, other senior leaders, and the leaders of English, science and humanities. I met with three members of the local academy committee and the director of learning from ATT. I also held a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of the trust.

Inspectors had formal meetings with pupils from key stage 3 and key stage 4, met with the head boy and head girl and spoke with pupils and sixth-form students when visiting lessons. We also considered the 84 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime, and at the start and end of the school day.

We observed learning by making visits to lessons in all key stages with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work when in lessons and looked at a sample of pupils' work from key stages 3 and 4.

Inspectors looked at performance information and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, governance and documents and records related to safeguarding.

Inspectors considered 83 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 53 free-text responses. We also considered 85 responses to the staff survey.