

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Miss Delia Martin  
Headteacher  
Benton Park School  
Harrogate Road  
Rawdon  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS19 6LX

Dear Miss Martin

### **Short inspection of Benton Park School**

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Gordon Watts and Mary Lanovy-Taylor, 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 last inspection.

You and the school experienced a challenging period where leadership capacity was compromised. However, you have met that challenge with the support of school improvement partners and the appointment of experienced and skilled staff to key leadership posts. The re-energised leadership team has now established a focused and strategic approach to improvement priorities.

Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well. They are realistic in their view that progress has been slower than they would have liked and do not make excuses for this. They are now very accurately focused on the appropriate priorities and are determined to support school leaders in bringing about the necessary improvements. They work closely with the school's leaders and hold them to account effectively.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the provision in the sixth form so that students achieve consistently well in all academic subjects. You were also asked to improve the quality of teaching further in key stages 3 and 4 in order to improve pupils' achievement.

Recently, you have been able to restructure the leadership of the sixth form, making effective use of existing leadership skills and making additional appointments where required. Furthermore, you have delegated quality assurance responsibilities to subject experts to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very accurately evaluated. More robust systems, which are used to evaluate students' academic performance, have been developed, allowing leaders to have an accurate view of students' progress through rigorous approaches to the analysis of school progress information. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form has improved and students' achievement has also improved across a wide range of subjects. Although improvements have been made, in many subject areas, improvement is at an early stage.

Leaders have developed the processes for evaluating teaching and learning across the school so that subject leaders have more involvement. Weaknesses in teaching and learning have been accurately identified and action to tackle these weaknesses has been swift and effective. The support which developing teachers require is closely linked to the school's quality assurance systems and this, in turn, informs professional development programmes. Leaders at all levels have improved the quality of assessment to ensure accuracy and reliability. They have been further supported in these developments through their work with other schools and local teaching school partnerships.

You have been quick to recognise that the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged has fallen behind others nationally who have similar starting points. The focus on these pupils is now a priority, and signs of improvement are evident in some subjects. However, these improvements are not yet consistent across all year groups and all subjects. For example, the progress in English of those pupils who are disadvantaged has significantly lagged behind the progress of others. There remains work to be done in this area, but inspection evidence suggests that the stronger elements of practice in the English department have, with focused leadership, the potential to make the necessary improvements which will benefit these pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective and fit for purpose. Staff receive appropriate training in child protection procedures. They are confident in their understanding of the actions they would need to take if they have any concerns about pupils. The designated safeguarding leader can demonstrate knowledge and experience through the records kept. These records evidence the prompt actions the school takes when safeguarding concerns arise. A small number of pupils access education off-site, attending a local provider. Staff ensure that the appropriate checks are carried out, making sure that these pupils are safe. Any absences are followed up rigorously and pupils' progress is checked against the school's expectations for them.

Pupils were found to have positive attitudes to learning in their lessons, showing respect towards teachers and their peers. Inspectors observed no disruption to

lessons at all during the inspection. Pupils spoke positively about their experience at the school and reported that pupils show respect and tolerance towards each other. Pupils also spoke positively about the guidance they have been given about keeping themselves safe, and the support and advice staff offer them.

Sixth-form students praised the school highly for the academic and pastoral support they are provided with. They state that the level of academic support 'wasn't always this way' and that there have been significant improvements over the past two years. They believe teaching and learning are much improved. They are confident that they will achieve their goals and are very pleased to be at Benton Park sixth form.

Many parents and carers responded to Ofsted's survey, Parent View. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive, and they reported that, in their view, the quality of pastoral support and care for pupils was of a very high standard.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have focused on establishing a sustainable and effective model of leadership and management at all levels after a period of instability. The current leadership capacity in the school is having a positive impact on the improvement priorities you have identified. You have redesigned your quality assurance processes and now middle leaders and developing leaders routinely observe and share good practice in departments. The pupils report that teaching and learning are much improved and that the work in lessons is now more challenging. Leaders have been busy ensuring that department development plans are focused on school priorities. Inspectors observed a consistency in the application of school policies. Most staff at the school are positive about the changes you have made and they believe the school has improved as a result.
- In 2016 and 2017, the progress students have made in their sixth-form studies has been disappointing. However, this year, there has been much improvement in a range of subjects. Senior and middle leaders have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form and improve the support students are given if they are struggling in their studies. Lesson observations, 2018 examination performance and the work seen in students' books are now showing that students are making stronger progress. The new leadership of the sixth form has an accurate view of what good progress looks like. Teachers and leaders are rigorously evaluating progress and this is having a measurable impact.
- Leaders have worked hard to change the attitudes of sixth-form students towards their attendance. Students no longer have the flexibility to only attend school when they have lessons. They are now expected to attend for the full school day. They now have structured independent study periods and regular opportunities to meet with staff to discuss academic progress and welfare issues. They very much appreciate this kind of support. The impact of these changes has resulted in significant improvements in their attendance.

- Teachers are working hard to raise the expectations of all pupils through their planning to stretch and challenge them in their learning. There remains work to be done in this respect. You acknowledge that there are inconsistencies across subjects and, while significant pockets of strength do exist, in many areas, these approaches are in the early stages of development. In the strongest examples, teachers use probing questions and provide opportunities for pupils to develop answers through extended writing. In the weaker examples, the work pupils are asked to complete is not differentiated sufficiently to challenge them and extend or deepen their learning. Where pupils are stretched, they respond well to the challenge. In these examples, pupils enthusiastically respond using the school's 'green pen' approach and inspectors observed in pupils' books a range of high-quality work which consolidated and deepened pupils' understanding.
- You have rightly identified the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged as a priority for improvement. Initial indications from 2018 external examination results were disappointing. Current progress information across year groups evidences a more positive picture, but you have not been complacent. School leaders at all levels, including governors, are determined to raise the profile of those pupils who are disadvantaged to ensure that they receive the support they need to achieve at least as well as other pupils who have similar starting points. During this inspection, the focus on those pupils who are disadvantaged was observed to be variable. Where teachers provide additional support, the pupils rise to the challenge and make better progress. However, this practice is not universal in all classrooms and there remains further work to do to ensure that it is.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all groups of pupils make good progress
- leadership at all levels continues to be developed in order to effectively deliver on school improvement priorities
- all groups of pupils are stretched and challenged in all subjects
- there is further improvement in the achievement of sixth-form students in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages, art, drama and theatre studies, information technology, psychology, sociology and physical education.

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. I also met with a small group of three governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Inspectors met with pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 and talked to pupils informally during lessons, breaktime and lunchtime about their views and experience at the school.

Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' books with subject leaders of English and modern foreign languages. We also looked at a range of school documentation, including current assessment information, leaders' school self-evaluation information, records about the behaviour and attendance of current pupils and information about safeguarding.

We took account of 77 responses to the staff questionnaire, 91 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, including 87 written comments by parents, and 160 responses to the pupil questionnaire.