

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Daniel Hinton
Headteacher
Sandgate School
Sandylands Road
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 6JG

Dear Mr Hinton

Short inspection of Sandgate School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Jane Holmes OI, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

During that time, there have been some changes to the senior leadership team at the school. You became headteacher at the beginning of the summer term in 2017, following the retirement of your predecessor. You have two deputy headteachers, one of whom you appointed only recently. She started full time in September 2017.

You and your staff have worked hard to establish a caring and calm environment for your pupils and students. It is clear when they arrive at school in the morning that they are happy, relaxed and ready to learn. Some show impressive confidence and can communicate well, given their age and their various needs.

Staff know their pupils well. They are ever alert to pupils' emotional and health needs and provide a good balance of supervision with opportunities to develop their independence and resilience. For example, staff entrust pupils in key stage 3 with taking messages to the school office. They also provide older pupils with carefully planned opportunities to shop for food items required during cooking activities.

You have created the same atmosphere at the Queen Katherine site. The environment there has the same ethos and values as demonstrated on the main site and summed up in the school's vision of 'Achievement for All'.

You and your leadership team have an accurate understanding of the quality of education your school provides. You devise action plans for school improvement that focus well on achieving the best possible outcomes for your pupils. Actions for the current year include introducing a new assessment and tracking system that will provide a clearer picture of pupils' all-round development, so that staff will have a fuller picture of the progress pupils make. You acknowledge, however, that the intended impact of each planned action needs to be measurable and more closely related to pupils' achievement.

The adviser from the local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. She provides effective support.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have a suitable system for noting concerns and you vigorously follow up issues with other agencies, such as social services, when necessary. The school's single central record of checks on staff is compliant.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff have received effective training and are knowledgeable about the signs of different types of abuse. You keep your staff's knowledge up to date by having safeguarding as a standing item on staff meeting agendas. You also keep safeguarding practices under review and make improvements where you identify a need. For example, you have recently revised the supervision of pupils on the playground and trained staff to adopt a more proactive approach to observing pupils' behaviour during breaktimes.

The section of the school on the Queen Katherine site is secure and there is a specific document on safeguarding arrangements. This covers matters such as secure access to the site and the appropriate ratios of adults to pupils, depending on the activity.

In conversation with inspectors, many pupils showed that they are confident to talk to trusted adults and said that they feel safe in school. Staff provide pupils with the knowledge they need to keep themselves safe in various situations, such as through e-safety lessons. You have also developed a communication system involving agreed picture symbols, so that pupils who have difficulties communicating verbally can express themselves and share any concerns they may have with staff.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I followed a number of key lines of enquiry, which I agreed with you at the start of the day. One key line of enquiry concerned how strong the quality of teaching is in the school. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. You have taken effective action in this regard. Leaders have improved behaviour in school by such means as the introduction of training for staff in behaviour support and intervention techniques and the use of

behaviour monitoring books. We saw evidence of good behaviour and good levels of attention from pupils in lessons and breaktimes. Adults manage pupils with particular behaviour needs effectively and calmly. You have also introduced a new assessment system that can assess and track a wider range of aspects of pupil's development so that you will have a clearer picture of pupils' progress. However, you acknowledge that the system is still new and you need time to establish it properly.

- Other actions you have taken to improve the quality of teaching since the last inspection include the provision of better homework. You now use online resources on your school's website and a web-based mathematics programme. Your deputy headteacher monitors the quality of any other homework that teachers give. You also have new home-school books, which are an effective means of communicating with parents. You have made texts more accessible to pupils through the use of picture symbols. Your staff are also mostly effective in their use of questioning with pupils, which is a direct result of training that you have put in place. The overall result is that teaching is effective. However, you accept that some learning objectives that teachers set for pupils do not focus specifically on the next steps in their learning. You also recognise that teachers do not consistently challenge the growing number of most-able pupils you have in school, although you are beginning to address this.
- Another focus was the effectiveness of the governing body's monitoring of the work of school leaders. This was another area for improvement from the previous inspection report. There is now a detailed monitoring programme in place, with governors checking specific subjects or areas of the school's work on a regular basis. This involves presenting reports of their observations to the whole governing body and holding regular meetings with senior leaders to receive information about standards in the school. Governors now have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school and say that they hold school leaders strongly to account. However, minutes of governors' meetings do not reflect the level of challenge that leaders report.
- My next key line of enquiry centred on how well prepared pupils are for life after they have left school. In the current sixth form, students experience a range of activities that prepare them effectively for their next phase. For example, you provide opportunities for 'real life' activities, such as shopping or gardening, and you follow students' preferences and choices wherever possible. The school works with a local college to provide supported internships and there is a strong transition programme in place between school and post-19 providers. These include various visits and activities, some of which begin three or four years before students are due to leave the school. Staff provide clear guidance to students, as all of them know where they will be going once they have left the school. In discussion with a sample of post-19 providers, it was clear that the school prepares students effectively, as they reported that students who had recently left the school were progressing well in their new positions. You are now seeking to work with other colleges to develop local provision further for less-able students.
- Another focus was low attendance and high persistent absence, especially for girls and disadvantaged pupils. You have put a number of strategies in place to

improve attendance. These include making phone calls to parents on the first day of absence and the introduction of a new electronic registration system, which gives the class teacher the ability to see patterns of absence sooner. Attendance is also a standing item at all meetings of the senior leadership team. Because of these strategies, attendance has improved and persistent absence has reduced. However, you acknowledge that you do not consistently provide an analysis of attendance against national averages to governors.

- Finally, you accept that the school's website is not compliant. You have undertaken to rectify this as soon as possible as part of the school's planned redesigning of the website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the school's new assessment and tracking system to provide an even clearer picture of pupils' progress
- the success criteria in their school's improvement planning are precise and measurable with a focus on pupils' achievement
- they provide more consistent challenge for most-able pupils
- governors' minutes reflect the strength of challenge that leaders say they provide
- the school's website is complaint and remains so.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The team inspector and I carried out short visits to the early years, all four key stages and the 16 to 19 provision, which were joint activities with you and your deputy headteacher. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of pupils. We held discussions with members of staff, governors, pupils and representatives of the local authority. We also held discussions on the telephone with parents, a local headteacher and with post-19 providers. We analysed the school's own assessment information. We evaluated 44 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There

were no other survey responses.