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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Alan Johnson
Principal
Newent Community School and Sixth Form Centre
Watery Lane
Newent
Gloucestershire
GL18 1QF

Dear Mr Johnson

Short inspection of Newent Community School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018 with Mark Henshaw, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment 18 months ago, leaders have tenaciously addressed the areas identified as requiring improvement at the time of the previous inspection. Your ability to bring about positive change during this time demonstrates that the school has the capacity to improve further.

The great majority of responses from parents and carers who used the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive about the commitment and care for pupils and post-16 students. Typical comments were, 'The pastoral care is superb', and 'They have a positive approach to supporting children holistically.' The quality of the school's personal, social and health education programme is having a positive impact on the lifestyle choices made by young people at Newent School. Your commitment to supporting pupils' physical and mental health is demonstrated by the achievement of the Mental Health Champions Award in 2017.

You have improved the processes to manage teachers' performance so that teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils are making strong progress in the majority of subjects. Most of your staff teach with confidence and have good levels of subject knowledge. You and other leaders have helped staff to improve the quality of their assessment and tracking systems so they can support pupils' learning more effectively. The variation between subjects in the sixth form has been reduced.

You have successfully halted a decline in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils through changes in leadership and partnership with a 'disadvantage pilot' project. This is improving both the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils currently at the school. However, while much success has been achieved, further work is needed to ensure that these pupils' outcomes are at least in line with those of other pupils nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are suitably trained in safeguarding procedures, in line with current legislation. You have acted decisively where safeguarding concerns have been raised. You work effectively with outside agencies to ensure that children are protected from harm, and you have been proactive in addressing any local issues in the community.

Pupils feel safe and are safe in the school. They receive and understand the advice provided about potential risks and how to stay safe in various situations, including on the internet. Pupils respect one another and value their differences. Bullying is rare and, when it does occur, pupils are confident that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils stated that there are adults in school that they can talk to about their own, or a friend's, concerns. Most parents believe that their children are safe, happy and well looked after at school.

The governors are well equipped to oversee this aspect of the school's work. The designated governor for safeguarding undertakes regular checks to ensure that the school's policies and procedures are rigorously applied. Processes and procedures for recruitment ensure that persons employed are suitable to work with young people. There is a culture of care and vigilance at the school.

Inspection findings

- We inspected the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who entered the school with attainment that was below the national average in English and/or mathematics. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils increased in 2017, and this improvement has continued in the current year. There is no discernible difference, for the current cohort, between the quality of work of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers. The school's assessment information confirms that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving and the difference between their progress and that of other pupils is reducing rapidly.
- Governors' oversight of this aspect of the school's work is helping drive forward improvements. They have a clear understanding of improvements required for the planning and evaluation of this funding to support their strategic leadership. The school's involvement in the regional pilot project is consolidating the improvements already made and helping improve disadvantaged pupils' attendance.
- Pupils supported by catch-up funding in Year 7 did not make sufficient progress in 2017. Senior leaders have improved teaching for these pupils. As a result,

current pupils are making better progress than previously, but further work is needed to secure their rapid progress in both English and mathematics.

- We looked at the impact that leaders have on the quality of teaching and learning. In the majority of subjects, school leaders have been effective in securing sustained improvements. For example, in languages, teachers demonstrate high expectations and provide detailed feedback to pupils about their work. This enables pupils to review their learning and improve their understanding. While much success has been achieved, a minority of teachers do not plan work that is sufficiently matched to the needs of their pupils. This was particularly noted in geography and for the most able pupils in science.
- The progress of boys in English has been less than that of girls, and the reverse is the case in mathematics. The focus of the school on improving the quality of teaching and learning is having an overall positive impact. In English and humanities, the difference between boys' and girls' achievement in Year 8 is still evident. However, by Year 10 this difference is barely discernible. In mathematics, the difference has now been reduced for current pupils, so that boys and girls from similar starting points are producing similar-quality work.
- A greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils are following relevant courses in Year 9, which gives them access to a broad curriculum. By reducing the high number of GCSE subjects that pupils entered, you have increased curriculum time and improved pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, learning has improved and is particularly strong in arts and technology.
- You have ensured that all learners in the sixth form now have the appropriate curriculum opportunities. In addition to your ensuring that challenging and appropriate courses are followed, students have a range of opportunities to develop leadership and employability skills, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, relevant work experience and an extended project. As a result, the proportion of students progressing to higher education is above average.
- Pupils reported that, since you were appointed as principal, there has been an improvement in behaviour because you are 'visible and approachable' around the school. Improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum have resulted in pupils having positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are punctual to lessons and well prepared for learning. They are calm and orderly as they move around the school between lessons and at breaktimes. The vast majority of parents also believe that behaviour at the school is good.
- In 2016, pupils' attendance was well below average. Subsequently, senior leaders raised pupils' and parents' awareness of the importance of good attendance. Pupils can now explain the impact of poor attendance on their examination results. As a result, attendance increased dramatically in 2017 and has continued to increase this year. Pupils' rates of attendance are now in line with the national average. However, while most pupils now attend school regularly, a small number of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, are still persistently absent from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils' attendance and progress continue to improve
- pupils who enter the school with below-average attainment in English and mathematics catch up rapidly with their peers
- teaching of the most able pupils in geography and science is more closely matched to their needs.

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

Yours sincerely

David New
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we visited 19 classrooms to observe learning and behaviour. We also observed behaviour around the school and when pupils moved between lessons. We held meetings with you and other members of staff. We talked with pupils and sixth-form students. I met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, and we interviewed middle leaders. We met with staff responsible for safeguarding, managing provision for disadvantaged pupils, behaviour and attendance.

We looked at pupils' books and information about the attainment and progress of pupils currently in the school. We looked at the school's website and documents relating to safeguarding and attendance. I read the school's self-evaluation document, the improvement plan, minutes of governor's meetings and reports that the school has commissioned from outside agencies. We took account of 68 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 183 responses to the student questionnaire and 59 responses to the staff questionnaire.