

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Samuel Strickland
The Duston School
Berrywood Road
Duston
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN5 6XA

Dear Mr Strickland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Duston School

Following my visit to your school on 20 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and trustees are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to develop curriculum planning so that pupils' learning in all subjects and key stages is ambitious and carefully sequenced to help them know more and remember more.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and two members of the board of trustees to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the subject leader for English, the special educational needs coordinator and a group of pupils. I reviewed several documents, including the school's improvement plan and self-evaluation. I visited some lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at their workbooks.

Main findings

You care passionately about the school, its pupils and staff. You lead with a moral purpose to improve the educational provision for all pupils.

You, the trustees and other leaders have worked to bring about much-needed improvement. Other leaders share your ambitious determination to improve the school. You have acted swiftly to address many weaknesses. There is now a firm foundation to ensure that pupils gain from an improved quality of education. You have rightly focused on improving the weaknesses that were evident in key stages 3 and 4.

Leaders and trustees know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have appropriate plans in place to address the areas for improvement reported at the last inspection. These plans are carefully thought through. They have appropriate actions to reach ambitious milestones. Leaders check to make sure that they embed improvements and are on track to improve further. They also check their work through external specialists who carry out reviews to make sure that leaders are focused on the correct priorities and are doing the right things. Your ambitious plans are bringing about the desired impact.

Leaders have prioritised improving teaching. They have established clear expectations of teachers and pupils. You have ensured that teachers benefit from research and training. This is improving teachers' expertise and practice in classrooms. Leaders are supporting teachers to develop their subject knowledge and deepen their understanding of how to teach their subjects.

During my lesson visits, the ambience in most classrooms was calm and purposeful. Almost all pupils were focused and engaged with their learning. Teachers asked questions skilfully and provided pupils with insightful feedback to deepen their understanding. In English lessons, teachers were developing Year 11 pupils' confidence in transactional writing. Younger pupils were focused on improving their reading skills. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Work is mostly planned to meet pupils' needs.

Subject leaders are developing ambitious curriculum plans. These plans are ordered to enable pupils to build on what they have learned before. The work is appropriately challenging. Pupils are progressing well in their learning. They know more and remember more over time. Leaders understand the need to ensure that curriculum plans build on the learning pupils make in their primary schools.

Leaders have worked to improve the provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have worked with external agencies to improve the learning of both groups of pupils. These pupils are beginning to benefit from improved provision that meets their needs and addresses

barriers to learning. Leaders need to embed these changes to bring about further improvements in the provision for these pupils.

Leaders are working with parents and carers whose children do not attend the school regularly enough. This work improved overall attendance and reduced persistent absence last year. Further improvement is needed this year. Some pupils need to attend more regularly.

Older pupils talk very positively about school changes and improvements. They say that behaviour has improved considerably. They understand what is expected of them in lessons and say that there is hardly any disruption to their learning. They are proud of their school.

External support

The school continues to draw on support from Brooke Weston and Sir Christopher Hatton teaching school alliances. The partnerships with these schools have been particularly helpful in developing leadership at all levels. This support is helping to improve the quality of education. You have also commissioned reviews from other organisations and professionals. These have helped improve safeguarding practices, provision for pupils with SEND, and support for disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Davies

Her Majesty's Inspector