

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



30 November 2018

Mr Gary Holding  
Headteacher  
The Heights Free School  
Heys Lane  
Blackburn  
Lancashire  
BB2 4NW

Dear Mr Holding

### **Short inspection of The Heights Free School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2018 with John Nixon, HMI, 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 September 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You and your leadership team are relatively new to your roles. However, it is clear to everyone that you are already having a very positive influence on improving the school. You have high expectations and lead by example. You are ably assisted by an assured, enthusiastic staff team. Together, you make a positive difference to pupils' attitudes to learning, and you renew their belief in themselves and in their futures.

There is a shared sense of passion for ensuring that pupils receive another chance at educational success. You have created an environment of care and nurture through the whole school community. Together with staff, parents and pupils, you are rightly proud of being part of The Heights. You break down barriers to learning and create an environment where pupils feel secure and are keen to re-engage in their learning.

Parents and carers who spoke with us were very positive about the school. They offered sentiments such as, 'This school is the best thing that ever happened to my child', and, 'Teachers have given my son back his mojo.' Parents were unanimous in saying that they feel their children are happy and settled.

The very large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire enjoy being part of the team at The Heights. They feel that it is well led and managed and they appreciate the opportunities that they have for training and development. Staff share your aspirations for pupils and endorse the calm, orderly

and compassionate culture that has been created. There is a strong sense of the staff team working to do their very best for pupils.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors asked you to improve and refine the information and data in your reports to parents. They asked you to share the evaluations that governors make of the school's progress with anyone that may be interested in the school. They also asked you to keep your website up to date. These requests have been fully addressed. Reports to parents are informative and outline the academic progress of pupils as well as their emotional and social development. Your website is of a good quality, fully up to date and easy to use. It creates a good first impression of your school. You provide detailed reports to governors and the trust board about the improvements in school and the progress that pupils are making. You also provide a useful overview to any schools that might be interested in commissioning your services.

Inspectors also asked you to increase the level of challenge for some pupils. You have refined your systems to regularly monitor the progress of pupils in English, spelling and mathematics. You have set high expectations of what pupils will achieve while they are in your care. Teachers use assessment information effectively to plan precisely for pupils' individual needs and their next steps in learning. This includes pupils' behavioural and emotional development. To make activities more demanding, you have introduced an incremental challenge to many tasks. Pupils of all ages talk enthusiastically about completing bronze, silver and gold challenges.

Pupils often start school with gaps in their mathematical understanding. Teachers are quick to identify these weaknesses and then work systematically to build pupils' skills, knowledge and confidence. Pupils' books confirm that this has been effective. However, books also reveal that pupils have limited opportunities to apply their new mathematical knowledge and understanding, and to think more deeply about their learning.

Your provision for careers information, education and guidance (CIEAG) is strong at key stage 4. It is less developed for your key stage 3 pupils. This is partly because these pupils are only placed with you for approximately a term. You have recently completed a careers audit which highlighted this gap in careers provision. In response, you have made plans to make changes to the curriculum. However, these plans are not currently in place.

There are a number of strengths evident at The Heights. Leaders have a strong, strategic vision and an accurate and honest view of the school. Their desire to offer the highest standards of education to pupils is shared by the local governing body and trust. The governing body's expertise, its ability to challenge and its passion for the success of every pupil make an important contribution towards the good practice that is evident in the school.

High-quality relationships are the cornerstone of the school's success. Teachers and other adults have a deep knowledge of pupils. The strong relationships that the staff build with pupils contribute to the school providing a safe, nurturing

environment in which pupils thrive and succeed. The school's relationship with parents is extremely strong. Leaders and staff work hard and with great success to build trust and confidence with parents, who are often disillusioned about education. The positive relationships that The Heights form with other schools, businesses, industry and agencies ensure that their pupils are given the very best opportunities to succeed in their future lives.

Pupils are enormously proud of their school. They talked with pride about how the school has given them opportunities and responsibilities that they would not otherwise have had, for example as prefects or as head girl or head boy. Pupils also talked appreciatively about how the school has turned them around. 'I wouldn't be who I am if it wasn't for them,' was a typical sentiment.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given a high priority. You and the staff team have ensured that pupils are in a safe and secure environment by promoting the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and are reviewed regularly to ensure that they meet statutory requirements and are fit for purpose. Staff and governors undertake appropriate, up-to-date training. This includes training about keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism, child sexual exploitation and neglect.

You and the school team offer a high standard of vigilance and support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have effective relationships with external agencies, including other local schools. You make an important contribution to the safeguarding of the vulnerable pupils in your care.

Pupils said that they feel very safe and well cared for. They feel confident that adults will help them if needed. They were able to talk about the ways that they can stay safe and healthy in a range of situations, including keeping themselves safe online. Parents feel that you and the staff keep children very safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils often start the school with knowledge and skills below those typically expected for their age. Assessment information is promptly collected by leaders. They closely track the progress of pupils to ensure that pupils are making as much progress as possible before they return to a mainstream school or go on to the next stage of their education. Key stage 4 pupils are expected to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics, and increasingly at GCSE. All pupils attain accreditations in functional skills and are offered a range of BTEC or equivalent qualifications. The school's assessment information and pupils' workbooks clearly indicate that pupils throughout the school are making at least good progress against their individual targets. These targets are set in English and mathematics and also for their behavioural and emotional development. Pupils are well supported when they struggle with their learning, so they make good progress from their starting points.

- Key stage 2 and 3 pupils typically attend The Heights for a term. The expectation that a pupil will be reintegrated into a mainstream school is agreed from the outset. Transition is a strength, with almost all pupils successfully returning to mainstream education or other appropriate provision. Arrangements are thorough and thoughtfully carried out. Leaders are extremely mindful of the needs of individual pupils and their families. To this end, leaders are flexible and adapt reintegration arrangements as needed, to make sure that pupils' return to mainstream school is enduring and successful.
- Careers guidance is appropriate and of a good standard at key stage 4. Pupils value the information that they receive to help them to consider their aspirations and make appropriate decisions about their futures. They are offered a range of careers guidance and opportunities for career 'tasters' based on their preferred pathways. Staff work successfully to ensure that pupils benefit from a range of work experience opportunities. The vast majority of pupils go on to college or to training to study or train in subjects such as child care, engineering, computing, art and design, and mechanics. Key stage 3 pupils are dual-registered. Leaders are unsure about the amount of CIEAG offered to key stage 3 pupils in their other registered school. Leaders are not providing sufficient careers guidance for these pupils.
- There are effective systems for monitoring absence. Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in the school. Improving an individual pupil's attendance is a priority for the school. This prepares the pupil to be reintegrated into mainstream education and supports them to be successful when they move on to their next stage of education. Compared to their attendance in their previous school, many pupils' attendance has greatly improved. The few pupils who have been persistently absent have been given appropriate support. This has been effective, and these pupils now attend much more regularly.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are offered opportunities to develop skills to apply their knowledge and understanding more deeply, particularly in mathematics
- they enhance provision of CIEAG to ensure appropriate guidance and support for pupils in key stage 3.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, we met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers. We met with the leads for assessment and for CIEAG. We also met with the designated safeguarding lead, the attendance officer and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I met with three members of the local governing body, including the chair, and also the chief executive officer and director of the trust. We had the opportunity to meet with two local headteachers. I also spoke on the telephone with an independent consultant who works with the school. We visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work.

We took account of the views of parents who talked with my colleague during the day. We also took account of the 33 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke informally with staff. I met pupils to talk about school life. We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. We looked at school documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the work of the governance of the school; and records relating to safeguarding.