

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Ms Catharine Darnton  
Headteacher  
Gillotts School  
Gillotts Lane  
Henley-on-Thames  
Oxfordshire  
RG9 1PS

Dear Ms Darnton

### **Short inspection of Gillotts School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 April 2016, 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 June 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to raise standards and have tackled the areas for improvement well. You lead the school very effectively and are admired and respected by staff, parents and pupils. You model the school's motto 'non nobis solum' (not by ourselves alone) very successfully. You have worked very effectively with your governors to manage a challenging financial position and made sure that the school continues to function well. Parents and carers describe you as 'outstanding, personable and receptive' and governors highlight your leadership as one of the key strengths of the school.

You and other leaders have focused on raising standards for all pupils by improving the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, teaching remains good across the school with some very effective practice in mathematics, humanities and modern foreign languages. Pupils continue to achieve well and attain high grades. Since the previous inspection, pupils have increased the amount of progress they make from their starting points. In 2015 the overall progress that pupils made by the end of key stage 4 placed the school in the top 25% in the country. The gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils continue to narrow so that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others nationally in mathematics and close to others nationally in English. However, in 2015 a small number of pupils who had special educational needs or disability, or had low prior attainment, did not make as much progress as their peers.

You continue to work effectively with your local primary schools and collaborate very successfully to support transition from primary to secondary school. You have also developed good links with the local college and other local secondary schools to create a network to support pupils' skills and readiness for further education or training in key stage 5 and beyond. You have usefully set up subject networks to support the development of subject leaders in the local area. However, you recognise that your senior and middle leaders would benefit from experiencing the best practice in the region and nationally so that they can further develop their subject expertise.

You have managed the challenge of recruiting staff well by developing innovative approaches to retain the best staff and attract good candidates to work at Gillotts. You and your staff are ambitious to improve the school further so that it becomes one of the most successful schools in the country. There are suitably rigorous approaches to managing teachers' performance, and an effective support programme of coaching and professional development. You have started to give staff more opportunities to visit other schools, and recognise that this could be developed further. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about working at the school and about you and your leaders. They say that there is 'an atmosphere of mutual support and teachers are encouraged to share best practice'.

Leaders have tackled both of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively:

- You have introduced a new system of assessment that all teachers use well to plan lessons. Leaders at all levels now use information about pupils' progress adroitly to analyse how well individuals and groups are doing. The majority of pupils make good progress and if they fall behind receive appropriate additional support. However, a few pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs or disability do not make the strong progress that their peers make.
- You have successfully raised the level of challenge for the most able pupils. Teachers regularly stretch and challenge pupils to do their best, and over the last two years the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades has risen in most subjects. However, your evaluation shows that there is still some variation between subjects and especially those that are optional at GCSE.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils are very well cared for and are safe in school. There are comprehensive procedures in place, policies are regularly reviewed and record keeping is meticulous. Staff are trained appropriately and governors have a good oversight of procedures to safeguard pupils. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of parents agree that the school is a safe and supportive environment. One parent describes 'the happy atmosphere' in the school while another reports that 'teachers really care for the students'.

## Inspection findings

- You, your fellow leaders and the governors are highly ambitious and you are aware that there are still areas that require further attention. You and your leaders know the school well, and your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses is robust and rigorous. Your improvement plan addresses the less effective areas well and sets out clearly where you expect to be by the end of the year. Leaders at all levels are aware of the whole-school priorities and how these fit into their own plans to raise standards.
- You monitor the work of the school well. You have developed the way you check the quality of teaching and give feedback to staff on how to improve their practice. You recognise that further work to develop coaching and training will ensure that all staff become as effective as those in your highest-performing teams.
- The new system of assessing pupils' work is effective and well understood by pupils and staff. However, you agree that the system is still relatively new and needs further refinement.
- Governance is robust and governors are well informed about the work of the school. They are acutely aware of the challenges you face in recruiting high-quality staff, and use their expertise appropriately to work with you on setting the strategic direction of the school. However, governors do not sufficiently challenge you about the impact of additional funding for pupils who are either disadvantaged or have special educational needs so that more of these pupils catch up with their peers.
- Standards in most subjects in 2015 were above or well above the national average. This was especially the case for mathematics, the separate sciences, modern foreign languages and humanities.
- Where achievement was lower than you expected in 2015, you have taken appropriate steps to put this right by supporting leaders to take a more robust approach to improving teaching. Current information, for example in art, shows that pupils are achieving higher grades than previously.
- The most able pupils achieved well in 2015, with many gaining the highest grades in the majority of subjects. The performance of current pupils is improving further and this is especially the case in English language where school information indicates that over a third of the cohort are expected to achieve the highest grades.
- Standards in mathematics are very high. The majority of pupils make similar or better progress than their peers nationally. A significant minority make exceptional progress. In English in 2015, the progress made by most pupils was just above the national average. Current information shows that more pupils are working well and are making better progress in English.

- In 2015, disadvantaged pupils made similar or better progress than other pupils nationally in mathematics, but this was not the case in English. Information shows that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in the current Year 11 cohort is narrowing. Disadvantaged pupils do well in many subjects in the school but there are still small gaps in their achievement in key stage 3, especially in English.
- Staff know disadvantaged pupils well and provide excellent support for these pupils' personal development. However, not all staff are sufficiently aware of the most effective approaches to support disadvantaged pupils' learning and to improve their attendance. Leaders and governors regularly review this aspect of the school's work. Some of their evaluation is not sufficiently focused on closing the small gaps that remain, to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make the same strong progress as others in the school.
- Teaching is effective in the vast majority of subjects and is especially strong in humanities, mathematics and modern foreign languages. There are good systems in place to improve the quality of learning. Work is well adapted to the needs of the most able and middle ability pupils. However, some staff are less skilful at providing for the needs of the least able, including some pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Consequently, these pupils make less progress than their peers, especially in key stage 3.
- The attendance of pupils is high and continues to improve, most notably among disadvantaged pupils. There are very few exclusions and there are good systems in place to support pupils who need additional help to behave well. However, disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs or disability are more frequently placed in internal isolation than other groups of pupils in the school.
- Behaviour around the school is calm and purposeful. Pupils are polite, exceptionally friendly and keen to share their very positive views about the school. There was virtually no litter seen in the buildings and support staff reported that pupils take great care of the environment. The overwhelming majority of pupils are happy at school and would recommend it to other pupils. The views of the many are reflected in the comment of one pupil who described the school as 'a joyful place'.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making strong progress so it is similar to that of other pupils in the school
- the quality of teaching for pupils who have special educational needs or disability improves by sharing more effectively the best practice within the school so that these pupils make progress in line with their peers.

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

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Two inspectors visited the school for one day. There were meetings with you, governors and middle leaders. One inspector attended a Year 7 parents' event and spoke to 12 parents. Meetings were held with pupils from key stages 3 and 4. Policies around safeguarding, your own analyses of pupils' achievement and other documents were scrutinised. Inspectors made brief visits to 12 lessons to see teaching and learning across a range of subjects and year groups. Fifty-five responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 70 staff and 120 pupil questionnaires were also reviewed.