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Miss Sonia Lockett
Headteacher
Stafford Pupil Referral Unit At the Stables
The Hollies
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Dear Miss Lockett

Short inspection of Stafford Pupil Referral Unit At the Stables

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with Jane Edgerton, 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 March 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.

There have been a number of changes in the leadership since August 2015. Since you joined the leadership team in January 2016 and became substantive headteacher in September 2017, you have ensured that the school has improved. This includes starting to address a decline in standards and addressing some of the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection.

Able supported by other leaders, skilful and committed members of staff and the good-quality management committee, you are addressing identified areas of weakness. You have high aspirations for all pupils and you have developed provision, within the restricted space of the school building and beyond, in order to help to get pupils ready for life after school.

Fundamental British values are embedded in the curriculum; pupils are helped to make appropriate choices and they are encouraged to be tolerant and respectful. This prepares them for life in modern Britain. Learning in the classroom is enhanced by a range of enrichment opportunities and practical learning facilitated by the use of carefully selected alternative providers. For example, during the inspection, a small group of pupils were fully engaged in purposeful learning activities at a local farm.

There is some teaching of a high standard in the school but the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. Where teaching is most effective, staff show pupils what they want them to do and encourage pupils to tackle activities independently. Where pupils make the most progress, teaching assistants are well deployed and staff use targeted questions that move learning on at an appropriate pace. The most effective staff also use subject-specific language and take opportunities to reinforce literacy and numeracy across the curriculum to develop pupils' skills and understanding. They often use a range of strategies and resources to interest pupils in their learning.

Verbal feedback is usually effective but written feedback does not always reflect the school's assessment policy. As a result, in some subject areas, pupils do not understand precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. This slows down the progress that they make.

The new approach to recording assessment information and tracking progress is beginning to help teachers to monitor progress more accurately. However, the system is not yet embedded and it is used inconsistently by staff. Therefore, its impact is variable.

Different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, make similar progress to each other in the school. However, those who do not attend regularly make very slow progress. Too many pupils are absent too often.

Pupils who attend regularly receive good-quality careers advice and want to do well. They value the system of rewards and enjoy productive relationships with staff. Behaviour is managed well and staff use their training to help pupils resolve situations in a positive manner. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are carefully tracked and action is taken to address any issues that are identified. As a result, incidents are declining. A very large majority of pupils met the school's expectations of their behaviour last term.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a priority for leaders and staff and there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe in the school. This aspect of the school's work is well led by the headteacher and the support manager and every member of staff knows that it is their responsibility to help pupils stay safe. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

All staff are well trained and kept up to date about safeguarding issues. Leaders and staff have a detailed understanding of their responsibilities and processes for reporting concerns are clear and used well. Referrals are timely and appropriate action is taken when required. Leaders follow up concerns tenaciously.

The school's single central record is compliant and paper and electronic records are stored securely. Pupils, staff and parents correctly believe that pupils are safe

and there are robust procedures in place to ensure that pupils who attend alternative provision are safe. Pupils are taught to stay safe in a range of situations. They learn about safe relationships, media safety, including online safety, and how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation, gangs, substance misuse, drugs, including alcohol, and child sexual exploitation.

Pupils who spoke to inspectors acknowledged that some bullying does occur between pupils who attend the school. However, they are confident that staff would deal with it quickly and effectively if they were made aware of it.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Where it is less effective, staff do not have high enough expectations of the pupils and they do not use assessment information well to set challenging activities. Some staff do not address misconceptions quickly enough to help pupils make rapid progress.
- Over time, art and physical education have been taught well and the teaching of mathematics is improving. However, as a result of staffing issues, the teaching of English has not matched the quality of that found in other subjects. In addition, pupils do not routinely develop their writing skills across the curriculum. They rarely write at length and opportunities to write for a particular purpose are not consistently available.
- Pupils take a range of qualifications, including GCSEs, in Year 11. Outcomes improved in 2016 and almost all pupils, who attended regularly, gained appropriate qualifications that helped them move on to sustained college courses or training in 2017. Last year, every pupil who completed accredited vocational courses at alternative providers passed at the appropriate level.
- All groups of current pupils, who are not regularly absent, are making improved progress. Disadvantaged pupils continue to make similar progress to other pupils but attain less well than others.
- Pupil premium funding has been used to provide enrichment activities, outdoor education, gym membership, breakfast club, one-to-one tuition and resources for disadvantaged pupils. This has led to improvements in progress, attendance and behaviour of individuals but leaders are aware that more needs to be done to further improve the attendance and attainment of this group of pupils.
- The provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is led effectively by a qualified special educational needs coordinator. Many pupils benefit from a range of interventions, including specialist support, tailored tuition, enhanced pastoral care and input from outside agencies. However, the quality of support that pupils receive in lessons is dependent upon the expertise of particular teaching assistants and how well these members of staff are deployed by the class teachers. This leads to variability in the quality of provision and the progress that these pupils make.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that further action is taken to ensure that:

- a much larger proportion of pupils attend regularly and fewer pupils are persistently absent
- teaching is consistently strong across the curriculum and the teaching of English improves rapidly
- recently introduced systems, such as the assessment process, are firmly embedded and used consistently well by staff to set challenging activities that match pupils' needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the business manager, other leaders and staff. The lead inspector spoke to two members of the management committee, a consultant who works with the school and had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer.
- An inspector made short visits to most classrooms with one of the deputy headteachers and the lead inspector visited an alternative provider with a member of staff.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally. Behaviour was observed at the start of the day, in lessons and during social time.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, parental surveys and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and the inspector looked at published information on the school's website.