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Mr Chris White
Headteacher
Stanton Vale School
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Dear Mr White

Short inspection of Stanton Vale School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018 with Matthew Spoons, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Stanton Vale School is a welcoming, vibrant school where the theme of pupils' support, care, dignity and aspiration runs throughout. The newly agreed school aim, 'creating brighter futures', is demonstrated in the relationships between staff, parents and pupils, which are respectful, friendly and supportive. As a result, pupils are polite, engaging and proud that they make strong progress in their learning and in their personal and social development. Pupils in the early years through to the oldest in the sixth form are eager to come to school and try their very best. They greet members of the staff team with happy smiles and are keen to start their personalised work as soon as they come into school.

Leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. In particular, you have secured sustained progress in developing the role of the team leaders in the school during a time of change and new teaching staff taking up their posts. You, and the innovative deputy headteacher, have reinvigorated and positively inspired your staff team to increase the pace of change and drive for school improvement. All are now involved and are encouraged to contribute. As a result, there is a strong culture of ownership and professional practice in driving forward school improvement initiatives.

Leaders and members of the governing body know the strengths of the school, as well as the key areas for further improvement. School self-evaluation is secure.

The governing body is active in holding leaders to account as well as providing support. There are plans in place to sustain the momentum for improvement. Leaders are keen to further develop the bespoke assessment approach and quality assurance systems. The aim is for middle leaders then to provide further opportunities for all pupils to be recognised for the small steps progress and outstanding achievements that they make over time.

You lead a very motivated and committed team that makes a positive difference to the education and life chances of the Stanton Vale learners. Staff have a clear sense of pride in the school and understand their role in contributing to its continued success overall. Middle leaders and leaders responsible for the post-16 provision know that they need to further develop the new school assessment system and increase the opportunities for post-16 student accreditation.

The school improvement partner, appointed by the local authority, said, 'The team have developed a detailed approach to school improvement planning and their evaluation of strengths and areas for development is broadly accurate.'

Leaders and other key adults in the school have a detailed understanding of the educational and care needs of each pupil. Strong teaching and well-thought-out personalised interventions enable teachers, teaching assistants and therapists to provide pupils with a personalised programme of learning and support. This helps pupils to tackle their next steps in learning positively.

You and your team are now at an exciting time in the school's development. In implementing the new approach to assessment, you have started to consider the needs and expectations of the post-16 students and their parents and carers in preparing them for success in adulthood. Inspectors identified that you need to increase the pace of this work.

Parents who provided information to the inspection and to school surveys indicate that they are unanimously positive about the school. One parent stated, 'The teachers, support workers and health practitioners are fantastic and exemplary at what they do.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and administrators have ensured that safeguarding takes high priority. Pupils are happy, safe and well cared for. Ensuring that their views are valued is a core part of the school's ethos.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding policies are fit for purpose. Training for staff ensures that they fully understand the risks that pupils may be vulnerable to, and the systems to keep them safe. Records scrutinised were detailed and included all the required information. There is evidence of a rigorous follow-up with external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Records are stored securely.

You have taken care to ensure that those members of staff responsible for administering medications or medical procedures have had a high level of training

and that their work is externally supervised.

You and your team make sure that pupils are taught to keep themselves safe, including through the very strong programme for personal and social education. Pupils, parents and staff raised no concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. There is a strong safeguarding culture in the school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors looked particularly at whether leaders have maintained a high standard of education since the last inspection. We reviewed how leaders self-evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school, how middle leaders evaluate pupils' progress, the use of the extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils and the quality of the new assessment system being implemented across the school.
- You and other senior leaders have made sure that your self-evaluation is increasingly accurate. In doing so, you have developed the role of middle leaders and have involved them fully in school self-evaluation activities. Professional development activities allow them to develop their leadership skills further. Governors are involved in self-evaluation and hold leaders to account by asking searching questions, for example making sure that the funding the school receives for disadvantaged pupils is spent appropriately. You and the inspectors agreed that in some aspects of the school's work there is a need for precision and a quickening of pace, for example regarding the development of post-16 accreditations and opportunities.
- Middle leaders have developed robust plans for the curriculum, including medium- to long-term plans. Because these plans contain challenge and guidance on how to meet individual pupils' needs, teachers deliver lessons which lead to good progress across the school. This progress is slowed, however, for post-16 students because they have a less-developed qualification and assessment pathway available to them. Challenging learning or work placement opportunities for some students are not always provided for them.
- Your current assessment information shows that in all key stages pupils usually make good progress, with some making outstanding progress, from their starting point over a course of a year. Work in pupils' books, portfolios and photographic evidence of pupils engaging in learning and social activities confirms that strong progress is being made. Parents share inspectors' view that their children make strong progress. Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the assessment outcomes.
- Leaders expressed reservations about the historical assessment system. You and your deputy headteacher, in partnership with five other schools, have analysed in detail the needs of each pupil. You are using that information for pupils with 'p' profiles to develop your own comprehensive system of assessment that is better able to capture the small steps attainment and achievement progress that your pupils make. This system is not yet embedded and its impact cannot be fully evaluated.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- post-16 students are provided with a wider range of accredited curriculum opportunities and pathways to better prepare them for adulthood
- plans for improvement are sharply prioritised and precisely outline the role of aspirant middle leaders and teachers in delivering the new assessment system across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Nixon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher, and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke with one governor and the school improvement partner on the telephone. Inspectors also met with some team leaders and members of teaching and non-teaching staff. The inspectors observed pupils arriving in the morning, visited classes to observe teaching and learning and groups of pupils, and spoke with pupils. They looked at and scrutinised pupils' current work (books and portfolios and picture evidence) and compared it with the curriculum and the targets and outcomes detailed in their education, health and care plans. Inspectors undertook joint learning walks with the headteacher and other leaders.

We studied and discussed the school's self-evaluation and improvement documentation. We scrutinised records of behaviour interventions, risk assessments, attendance records and safeguarding information. We considered the four responses to the Ofsted free-text service. There were no responses to consider from the staff or pupils' surveys and no responses were viewable on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.