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Mr Stephen Childs
The Smart Centre
Canterbury Road
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Dear Mr Childs

Short inspection of The Smart Centre

Following my visit with John Lambern, Her Majesty's Inspector, to the school on 7 October 2015, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since joining the school in September 2013, you and the new head of centre have developed many areas of the school. Leaders, including the management committee, have a clear vision and this has created a shared understanding of the expectations of the school for staff and pupils. Leaders and staff successfully promote high aspirations and accept no excuses with regard to conduct, behaviour or achievement.

You have developed a successful partnership with Melrose School since the last inspection. This has helped expand the school's leadership and share best practice across both schools.

Members of staff, including those in Merton Medical Education Services, which the school calls 'The Bungalow', and in your alternative provision, have strong relationships with their pupils. There is mutual respect and tolerance, and pupils feel safe and secure as a result. Over time, pupils develop an enjoyment of education, and talk confidently of the significant improvements in their behaviour and attitudes to learning. As pupils move through the school, they build their ability to reflect on their academic and personal progress, and this enables them to identify accurately what they need to do improve. Those in alternative education told inspectors they

benefited from working alongside, and developing working relationships with, pupils from other schools.

Under your leadership, the staff team have worked cohesively together to address successfully the areas for development identified at the time of the last inspection. Leaders have accurately identified that the school has clear areas for further development. You have worked with staff to create a detailed development plan with specific actions to address areas identified for development. Senior leaders have empowered middle leaders with greater responsibility. For example, the middle leader responsible for 'The Bungalow' has helped secure improvements in teaching, assessment and outcomes for pupils.

You have focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Assessment is regular and methodical. Staff use standardised tests to assess pupils' progress from their entry to the school. They validate the accuracy of this information through regular moderations. Leaders are therefore very accurate in their evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders at all levels have ensured that safeguarding is a core priority for all members of the school community. There is a keen awareness that some pupils are vulnerable to child sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse because of their personal circumstances. Staff training is up to date and they are fully aware of their responsibilities, including their duties with regard to female genital mutilation and preventing extremism. Records kept about vulnerable pupils and safeguarding incidents are detailed and of a high quality.

Leaders work extremely closely with other agencies. Regular multi-disciplinary meetings are held, drawing in social care, health and police professionals as required. This enables the school to keep pupils safe and work effectively with families to improve individual circumstances.

The school is successful in helping pupils to understand how to stay safe in a range of circumstances. Personal safety is taught as part of the curriculum and pupils develop a mature appreciation of how to manage risk beyond school. Pupils know who to talk to if they have concerns, and this is reinforced by clear signage around the buildings. Pupils told inspectors how the school has helped them to take greater responsibility for staying safe.

In partnership with the local authority, the school checks the quality of the alternative provision at least annually. These visits gather evidence and formally report on the quality of behaviour, safeguarding, teaching and outcomes for pupils. This has ensured leaders are confident that pupils attend safe settings, delivering an appropriate quality of education.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, including the management committee, are rightly proud of the changes that have been made since the last inspection. The school has expanded the range of teaching and curriculum offered to pupils who attend Merton Medical Education Services at 'The Bungalow'. Pupils now receive a full curriculum offer. Pupils who have begun studying in a mainstream school are offered tutoring to continue studying subjects beyond the normal centre curriculum. Those attending the English as an additional language (EAL) alternative provision are also offered a full range of curriculum subjects.
- Leaders have shown tenacity in further improving behaviour and attendance. The number of pupils being excluded for a fixed number of days has fallen steadily, but remains above the national average. Attendance has also improved markedly over the past three years, though it is still below the national average for all secondary schools. The school carefully records behaviour and attendance, analysing patterns and identifying trends to inform future improvements.
- The members of the management committee know the school very well. They are highly challenging of leaders and are ambitious for all pupils to achieve their full potential. Committee members have a clear vision for the future and proactively recruit new members who will help them achieve these goals. They are reflective and seek out training when it is required. Members have been instrumental in identifying key developments for the school, for example the formal partnership with the Melrose School, and in identifying the need to employ a trained business manager with commercial experience. This development has been key in ensuring the school receives financial payments on time and that it remains financially stable as a result.
- Some pupils are educated at a range of alternative providers, and others attend the school's own alternative provision for EAL and 'The Bungalow'. Leaders monitor closely the behaviour, welfare and learning of pupils attending alternative provision to ensure it meets their needs.
- The curriculum effectively meets the needs of pupils because leaders keep it under review. Pupils' views and achievement are at the heart of the annual review. When changes are identified, they are trialled initially and feedback is sought from pupils before decisions are made. For example, citizenship was introduced this year due to pupil demand. As a result of positive feedback and strong pupil progress, leaders are offering this as a full GCSE course. This course has enabled pupils to become more informed citizens.
- Most pupils make good progress from typically low starting points. Progress is particularly strong in mathematics and science. This helps pupils to make up for historical underachievement prior to joining the school. Information about pupils currently at the school shows that this good progress has been maintained this academic year. Leaders rightly acknowledge that fewer pupils make accelerated progress in English than in mathematics or science.

- Pupils who attend the centre for short periods of time before returning to a mainstream school make expected progress. Leaders acknowledge the assessment of these pupils needs to be refined to further improve teaching, and accelerate the pupils' progress while attending the centre.
- Pupils' subject-specific vocabulary is developed well by teachers, particularly in art, science, and health and beauty. This was observed during lessons in the main centre, in 'The Bungalow' and in the alternative provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and members of the management committee should ensure that:

- they refine assessment systems to better inform teaching, so that all groups of pupils make accelerated progress, especially those who are at the centre for a short period of time
- they further strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English so that it is as strong as in mathematics and science.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Merton local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Storrie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. Meetings were held with a range of teachers, the Chair and two other members of the Management Committee, and a representative from the local authority. The inspectors reviewed the home tuition provision for pupils with medical needs through visiting 'The Bungalow' and holding a telephone interview with a parent. Inspectors visited a sample of teaching at 'The Bungalow', the centre and in the alternative provision. They scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, minutes of meetings, information on the progress of pupils and the single central record. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the inspection.