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Dear Mrs Last

Short inspection of Alderwood

Following my visit to the school on 5 October 2016 with Andrew Smith, 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Alderwood is a welcoming environment, where pupils work cooperatively and learn effectively. In their previous schools, your pupils have experienced multiple fixed-term exclusions, or permanent exclusions. However, due to the combined efforts of yourself, the associate headteacher, leaders, staff and governors, almost all of these pupils experience success in school for the first time. They go on to make good progress from their various starting points, and after their time in your school, almost all are able to reintegrate successfully into a permanent provision.

Pupils learn how to manage their emotions and behaviour at Alderwood. This is shown well in their movement around the school. Pupils arrive sensibly and enthusiastically. They use the kitchen, supervised by staff, to make themselves healthy breakfasts before school, or snacks at break. At lunch, pupils sit down and eat a hot meal, serving themselves and one another. They learn to use cutlery effectively and develop appropriate manners. They chat cordially with adults and their classmates, while also regularly opting for the healthy food and drink. Key stage 2 pupils explained to one inspector that they were drinking water at lunch because 'it was important not to drink too many fizzy drinks, as they contained too much sugar'. Pupils tidy away and then spend the remainder of their lunch chatting with staff, playing with their friends, or reading in the small library area. Staff mingle with pupils amiably during this free time, often eating with pupils, or playing

card games and supporting pupils to play well together. At the end of the day, pupils leave the school appropriately and safely.

Pupils are happy at school. They say that they prefer being at Alderwood as they are achieving more than in previous schools. Pupils feel that most teachers and adults help them to improve, especially in their literacy development, and that they learn well. They say that teachers are interested in what they have to say. The school's own surveys of parents, since the previous inspection, also show that parents would recommend the school. Staff have received a variety of letters, cards and emails from grateful parents.

You have acted on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection, especially around developing pupils' literacy skills. Pupils' writing in a number of subjects across the curriculum, most notably in English, science, history and geography, has improved. There is clear evidence that staff identify the gaps that pupils have in their literacy skills, and support pupils to continue to improve. This is leading to rapid progress for many, especially your key stage 2 'Bridge' pupils (the provision for pupils with complex learning needs who stay with you to complete key stage 2 before moving onto specialist schools). These pupils often come in with very low starting points. Exemplary display work in the Bridge area shows numerous examples of pupils redrafting work to improve their extended written answers in a range of different topics. Pupils show real pride in how they display and illustrate their work, and as a result, produce high quality pieces.

Staff know pupils well and use this knowledge to make sure that they meet pupils' needs. Leaders carry out thorough assessments of pupils. Regular assessments are externally marked and ensure that your judgements about pupils' progress are accurate. Additionally, your 'five step progress tracker' is being constantly refined and used to monitor the incremental improvements in pupils' social, emotional, behavioural and mental health development. Alongside this, you analyse other information about your pupils, for example their attendance, and use this information to judge how effective the school is in helping pupils. You acknowledge that these systems are not yet centralised enough. As a result, not all leaders are as evaluative as they need to be about pupils' progress in all aspects of their development.

Despite improvements since the previous inspection, you experienced some turbulence in leadership and staffing at the school in the spring term 2016. There was an absence of a number of leaders and staff, including yourself. This impacted negatively on the pupils in the shorter-term provision, as many pupils struggled to cope with the unfamiliar temporary teachers and leaders. Equally, temporary staff did not have a good enough understanding of the school's systems and procedures. Consequently, the management committee and the local authority provided significant support to ensure that these matters were rectified. This included the appointment of an interim associate headteacher during your absence. You rightly praise her work to re-stabilise the provision so rapidly. Upon your return to the school, you have worked well together to ensure that improvements continue.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are well trained in the most up-to-date guidance and actively use the referral system to report concerns. They are knowledgeable about the signs of abuse and vigilant about their pupils' well-being. Morning safeguarding briefings are used to ensure that staff are always clear on the follow-up from their referrals, and understand how the school links with external agencies. Staff speak highly of the usefulness of these meetings.

The designated safeguarding lead has a thorough understanding of the national guidance and statutory duties and of the local support on offer. Referrals to external agencies are timely and effective. Where leaders remain concerned about a pupil, they tenaciously follow this up with repeated referrals. Staff understand the links between absence and child protection, and attendance is well monitored. Concerns about pupils' absences are reported swiftly to the appropriate external agencies, such as the educational welfare officer or children's services.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe. Your team works with pupils and their parents to keep them up to date about how to stay safe, especially online. You have used one-to-one meetings with parents to communicate messages about ways in which they could check on their child's online safety at home. There are extensive filters on your own computer systems, which are reviewed regularly to allow pupils access to age-appropriate learning materials.

You routinely analyse information about behaviour, bullying and the use of physical restraint in order to improve the effectiveness of your systems. All staff are trained in physical restraint and records where restraint has been used are appropriately logged. Almost all pupils say that bullying is not a problem at Alderwood, and if it does happen, staff deal with it effectively.

Both the local authority and your management committee were concerned in spring 2016 that a lack of permanent staffing and the absence of leaders had left the school's safeguarding procedures temporarily vulnerable. The local authority gave extensive support and guidance to the school, and the management committee appointed two new governors with specialisms in safeguarding to support the new interim headteacher. Consequently, the interim headteacher, the management committee and the local authority acted swiftly to ensure that all staff, especially the many who were new, were trained appropriately and that equipment around the school site was safely stored.

While protocols and training are well embedded at Alderwood, and there is tenacious work around referrals to external agencies, you acknowledge that there are still a few examples of administration and paperwork that do not always reflect the high-quality practice at the school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses in the school's

provision. You are knowledgeable about pupils' needs and what support is available locally. You actively welcome the support and challenge from the local authority. You rightly acknowledge that the biggest challenge you have had in recent months is stability in staffing.

- You have acted rapidly to repair the issues caused by staffing absences in spring 2016. Recruitment to specialist areas, most notably mathematics, remains difficult, despite your best efforts. You have also faced challenges in appointing administrative and office staff. However, you have recruited creatively, to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable and well trained to teach a number of subjects to a high standard.
- You develop your own teachers from within the school. You and other leaders encourage and support non-teaching staff to train as teachers. These staff are especially knowledgeable about positive classroom management techniques, and about the safeguarding work that goes on with external agencies.
- Teaching is good, and in some areas it is exemplary because of the difference it makes to increase pupils' progress. Teaching, particularly in the Bridge, is highly effective in ensuring that pupils, often from very low starting points, make rapid progress, especially in reading, writing and communication. This is because resources, strategies and feedback correspond well to pupils' abilities.
- Your key stage 2 pupils in the Bridge join you for up to the last two years of key stage 2, before moving on to specialist special educational needs provision to meet their complex needs. While with you, pupils have a wide and varied curriculum, including English, mathematics, science, and creative and technical subjects. Pupils, who start with abilities significantly lower than typical for their age, make rapid gains in their numeracy, reading, writing and communication skills across these subjects.
- Pupils from key stages 2 and 3 pupils, who stay for around two to three terms, are provided with a curriculum which works around the 'gaps' that pupils have due to previously interrupted educational experiences. The introduction of computer science has become popular among many pupils, who discussed their learning enthusiastically with inspectors.
- Leaders, including those who are newer to their positions, constantly refine the curriculum to meet the ever-changing needs of your pupils. Leaders have extended the school day since the previous inspection to allow for more curriculum options to be taught. All pupils access lessons full time at the school. The school does not use any form of alternative provision.
- All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents are given regular opportunities to visit teachers, discuss their children's progress and celebrate their successes. Leaders use their assessment information to provide evidence for pupils' support plans and set appropriately challenging academic and personal targets. They routinely monitor improvement against both these areas.
- Pupils make good progress, and sometimes better, from their various starting points. Leaders are thorough in assessing pupils' levels of need, and effective in applying for education, health and care plans, where they feel that pupils have greater levels of need than already identified.

- Disadvantaged pupils, including children who are looked after, make good progress at the school. Although the school receives more additional funding for these pupils than at the time of the previous inspection, there are occasions when they still do not have access to this funding. The additional funds are used mainly to meet pupils' considerable social, emotional and mental health needs, for example through the employment of a school counsellor. Pupils talk through their issues with a trained specialist who helps them find ways to cope appropriately, and consequently to access their learning more successfully.
- The additional funding that the school receives to engage pupils with sport and healthy lifestyles is used very effectively. Pupils access an ever-widening range of sports. Leaders listen to pupils' views and use this information to adapt the sports available. The most recent additions to this curriculum are kayaking and gymnastic free-running. The money is also used very effectively to hire specialist coaches to teach pupils or to train staff. Pupils enjoy their physical education lessons because they are well taught and varied. Pupils are gaining accreditation in many areas, which heightens their understanding of educational success. Where the school does not have the facilities, it transports pupils to local sporting venues so that they can access these specialist facilities.
- Leaders make a real difference to pupils' attendance to school. Leaders liaise well with parents and the local authority. This has led to dramatic increases in individual pupils' attendance by comparison to their attendance at their previous schools. Consistently, year on year, the school can show evidence for significantly increased attendance for some of the most vulnerable pupils, most notably disadvantaged pupils.
- Staff are very proud to work at your school. All staff work together, irrespective of hierarchy and no matter what their role, for the best of the pupils. Following staffing turbulence in 2016, you gathered staff views and acted on their concerns about communication. Although some staff, particularly those newer to Alderwood, would still like more support in developing behaviour techniques, all staff enjoy working at the school. Pupils also say that where behaviour is, on occasion, not as positive as it should be, it is where newer staff are not as effective in supporting some pupils' specific needs.
- Governors are knowledgeable, committed and tenacious. They know the school, and the challenges that leaders face, well. They do not accept excuses. They are dedicated to ensuring that pupils get the best and right provision for their needs.
- A number of governors have had an experienced and successful background in education. They effectively challenge leaders and external agencies about the quality of provision for pupils. The actions taken by this group during the period of staffing turbulence was instrumental in ensuring that the dip in the performance in parts of the provision improved quickly.
- Support from the local authority has contributed well to help leaders maintain standards at Alderwood. The work of the standards and excellence commissioners has been meticulous and thorough.
- On occasion, there are pupils who require more specialist support than the

school can offer, or they need longer-term provision. This is especially true for pupils' very specific special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, on occasion, the school cannot always find appropriate next-stage education for a few pupils, despite their extensive work with the local authority.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support leaders and staff who are new to their positions, to establish positive relationships with pupils quickly and sustain the good provision at Alderwood
- they continue to refine the administration around safeguarding so that it always reflects the good practice in the school
- the array of information on pupils' progress is centralised so that all leaders, especially those who are new to their position, can use this to fully evaluate the difference they are making
- they continue to work with the local authority on ensuring that next-step specialist provision is found promptly for the few pupils whose special educational needs determines that mainstream provision is not appropriate.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

From the pre-inspection review of published information and the school's information online, inspectors had four lines of enquiry that they chose to test during the inspection day. These were:

- How far have leaders acted on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection, most notably in literacy and teaching?
- How far are leaders ensuring that pupils access curriculum time and provision that is broadly proportionate to what they would receive in a mainstream school?
- How are leaders ensuring that pupils are kept safe?
- How far are leaders securing good outcomes for pupils by the time that they leave Alderwood, especially disadvantaged pupils and those that need to catch up?

During the inspection, we spoke with the headteacher, the associate headteacher, and other representatives from the leadership team. We also spoke with pupils throughout the day and formally. We met with three representatives from the management committee, including the acting chair, the acting vice-chair and the safeguarding lead governor. We also spoke to three representatives from the local authority, including the senior standards and excellence commissioner.

We visited classrooms, undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work, and chatted with pupils at breakfast, break, lunch, and at the end of the day. We listened to some pupils read and talked to them about their experiences of reading in the school.

We reviewed responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires, considered Staff View and Pupil View, and looked at the school's own surveys of parents, staff and pupils. We also reviewed an array of school documentation. This included documentation related to safeguarding and children looked after. Inspectors also spoke to a sample of the schools whose pupils attend Alderwood or who take pupils from Alderwood once they complete their studies there.