

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Nick Stanton
Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School
Ryeleaze Road
Stroud
Gloucestershire
GL5 1JR

Dear Mr Stanton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection and my previous visit. Please pass on my thanks to all of the pupils and staff I met during the visit. In particular, I would like you to thank the pupils for their politeness and willingness to talk to me about their work and plans for the future.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the management committee are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The purpose of this visit was to check that the excellent progress made by the time of the first monitoring visit in December 2015 had been sustained. All the strengths noted in the letter following that visit have not only been maintained but many developed further.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, a member of the management committee and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last monitoring visit and your analysis of information about, for example, pupils' attendance, progress and personal development. The school

improvement plan and self-evaluation were evaluated. We visited lessons together to talk to staff and to pupils about their work.

Context

A reorganisation of alternative provision in Gloucestershire was instigated in April 2015. At this time, an executive headteacher and a management committee with oversight of all three maintained alternative provision schools in Gloucestershire took up their roles. You took up your post as operational headteacher for the Stroud and Cotswold Alternative Provision School, with responsibility for the two centres that make up this provision currently.

The executive headteacher who resigned in July 2016 has not been replaced. As a result, from the start of this academic year your role changed from being operational lead, directed by the executive headteacher, to headteacher with a much wider set of responsibilities. A new chair of the management committee recently took up post.

Together, the two centres provide places for primary and secondary pupils permanently excluded from schools in this part of Gloucestershire, places for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion and short-term places for pupils who need support with improving their behaviour. The centres also provide for other pupils in need of school places and some excluded from the other alternative provision schools. The Belle Vue Centre is for pupils of primary age and those from the early secondary age range. The Ryeleaze Centre is used mainly for students in Years 10 and 11. Most of the students in The Ryeleaze Centre remain in the school until they leave at the end of Year 11. You have extended the team of staff at the centres to give even greater breadth and depth of expertise.

The school works with a wide range of other providers and organisations to ensure that pupils, particularly those in Years 10 and 11, have a curriculum and experiences that meet their needs well to prepare them for the next stage in their education or training.

Main findings

At the time of the first monitoring visit, it was clear that the school had already made excellent progress towards becoming a good school under your outstanding leadership. Your accurate self-evaluation identifies the many good features of the school and some that are particularly strong. The high-quality improvement plan clearly outlines how you intend to improve the school further.

You have built an even stronger team than at the time of my previous visit, with an excellent breadth and depth of expertise of working with vulnerable pupils with a range of often complex needs in both the primary and secondary age ranges. Collectively, the team has an impressive set of complementary skills. Pupils, and their parents, value this range of expertise highly because there is always someone

who can give them support, guidance, direction and, when necessary, the challenge they need. Other schools in the area hold the school in very high regard for the highly effective way it deals with those pupils who are extremely vulnerable, at risk of being or excluded from school or who need help to get them back on track. Headteachers praise the work your staff do to successfully help pupils reintegrate into mainstream schools and the support and guidance your staff provide for their own staff. They also appreciate your flexibility in responding to their needs, often at short notice. The school, under your leadership, has developed a high-class reputation in Gloucestershire and over a wider area.

Your staff have welcomed and participated enthusiastically in the very wide range of training, often leading to recognised qualifications, you have arranged for them. While they have found some of this challenging, they value the chance it gives them to develop additional skills and knowledge to support pupils even more effectively. They have become a highly effective and collegiate unit.

The most impressive feature is the intensity of the focus on the needs of individual pupils, irrespective of the amount of time they spend in the school. This starts with the highly detailed and perceptive initial analysis of pupils' needs and progresses through frequent and sensitive monitoring to the support to help them move on to their next step. You provide each pupil with a package of support that meets their social, emotional and academic needs extremely well. This includes individual support, a personalised curriculum, engagement with a range of external services, opportunities to develop their self-esteem and confidence, support for their emotional development, and developing the skills to manage their behaviour and work with their peers and adults. The outcomes are tangible in pupils' markedly improved attendance, attitudes and commitment to do well. It can also be seen in how successfully pupils are prepared to go back to their school or move on to a provider that can better meet their specific needs or for post-16 education, training or an apprenticeship. Those that spend longer periods of time with you also make much-improved academic progress given their often low starting points when they join the school.

You and your staff have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the range of appropriate services and providers in the area and use this to provide bespoke opportunities for many pupils, such as work experience, specific training or specialised support. You carefully judge when they are ready to make more academic progress and challenge and support them well to enable them to do this. The pupils I spoke to take obvious pride in their work and much is of a high quality. Pupils benefit from, and other schools value, the expertise in the school in working with and accessing additional support for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those with or needing an education, health and care plan.

Safeguarding arrangements meet all requirements and are effective. The procedures are extremely rigorous to take full account of the nature of the school pupil population and the extensive use of provision on other sites.

External support

The local authority provided support through the project group that had been set up in September 2014, prior to the June 2015 inspection, largely because of disruptions arising from changes in leadership over a short period (four headteachers in six years). This group includes a member of the alternative provision schools' overall management committee, who is the headteacher of a neighbouring commissioning secondary school, acting as the 'link member'. The project group has closely monitored the progress the school has made over that time. The final formal meeting of the project group was in September 2016 as it had been determined that the school no longer needed this level of support. The local authority continues to monitor and support the school through the strategic lead for alternative provision and an education adviser. The management committee continues to provide support and challenge through its governance arrangements. The link member knows the school extremely well and provides high-quality support and challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector