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Dear Ms Postlethwaite

Short inspection of Somervale School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2016 with Svetlana Bajic Raymond, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Please pass my thanks on to the pupils and staff we met, and whose classrooms we visited, during the inspection. Your pupils are a delight to talk to and you can be proud of the way they conducted themselves during our visit. The staff clearly enjoy working in the school.

Pupils, parents and staff all make very positive comments about the culture of care, support and high levels of concern for all pupils' well-being and all-round development, as well as their academic achievement. There is a high proportion of vulnerable pupils in the school; the attention given to helping these pupils so that they are prepared well for their next steps is exceptional. This is a clear strength of the school and testament to the strong leadership provided by the executive headteacher and the impact you have made in the short time you have been at the school since September. Pupils are impressed and touched by how well you already know them as individuals. You are supported very well by the executive headteacher and by other senior leaders.

You, other senior leaders and governors judge that the school is at least good in all aspects, with strengths in some areas, such as the personal support for pupils. We

agree. The inspection findings fully support your self-evaluation. School leaders ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress and achievement are reliable and accurate. These enable you to evaluate precisely the effectiveness of teaching and support for pupils, as well as making sure that pupils, and their parents, know how well they are doing.

Pupils join the school in Year 7 with starting points that are well below average. At least one in five join the school at other times, often with less than positive experiences of education. Current pupils in all year groups are making strong progress in a wide range of subjects. Last year, pupils achieved well in the examinations at the end of Year 11 and their overall attainment was just above the national average.

The achievement of the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is in line with others with similar starting points. The large majority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong progress. Considerable attention has been given to raising the achievement of pupils with low starting points, and they now do well. Much has been done to successfully raise teachers' expectations, and this has led to the improvements in pupils' achievement. However, in a range of subjects, including in mathematics and science, the most able pupils are not yet challenged to do as well as they can. This includes the small number who are also disadvantaged.

Those students in the sixth form, who are enrolled at Somervale, make progress from their starting points in line with the national averages overall and for the subjects they study. The joint 16 to 19 arrangements with Norton Hill School (the Midsomer Norton Sixth Form) provide a broad curriculum that meets students' needs well.

The local governing body is very supportive of you and other senior leaders. Governors share and make a strong contribution to the positive culture and ethos in the school. They agree with your and other senior leaders' evaluation of the performance of the school. They are led well by the chair and are very well informed about pupils' progress and achievement. They have a detailed knowledge of the work of the school, such as in the different curriculum areas and the effectiveness of the support for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They closely evaluate the impact of additional funds, such as how well the pupil premium is used to support and raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Governors use this knowledge well to provide you and other leaders with an effective balance of support and challenge.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors, the executive headteacher, you and other leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are up to date, meet requirements and are fit for purpose. The senior leader who is the designated safeguarding lead is very well informed about all aspects of safeguarding and provides strong leadership. Additionally, responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of the safeguarding

arrangements is shared by all senior leaders and understood well by all staff. Best practice is shared effectively with other schools in the trust. Relevant records are detailed and of good quality.

There is a highly effective culture that places the care, safety, welfare and well-being of pupils at the heart of everything the school does. Effective procedures ensure that pupils are safe and very well looked after. School leaders place an extremely high priority on the welfare of the many vulnerable pupils in the school. Pupils and sixth-form students are fully involved in creating and maintaining this culture. The views of pupils are gathered frequently and considered very carefully. They are universally positive about how well 'the school' looks after them. They place a very high value on how well they are known as individuals, the friendliness of staff and how they are confident in being able to report and discuss their concerns with teachers and other adults. It is difficult to imagine a friendlier and more harmonious school community.

Governors are well trained and their attention to safeguarding helps to ensure that it permeates the life of the school. The link safeguarding governor, the chair of the local governing body, has regular and frequent meetings with the designated safeguarding lead to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of arrangements and of staff training. Staff are well trained, including in understanding the 'Prevent' duty to ensure that they are alert to the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Safeguarding is promoted frequently through staff briefings and meetings. Regular reports are provided for the local governing body. Governors are aware of the need to keep the procedures for the safe use of computers and other technology, and the pupils' use of the internet and social media, up to date.

The overwhelming majority of parents believe that the school keeps their children safe and cares for them well. All of those who responded to the Ofsted online survey say that their children are happy at the school and make good progress. Many make statements such as: 'Somervale is a fantastic school and I can't praise it enough.' Pupils enjoy coming to school, as shown by their good attendance. Pupils are clear about what they need to do to keep themselves safe. Teachers and other staff also strongly agree that pupils are safe. An analysis of all relevant information, such as absence data and records of any incidents of poor behaviour, is undertaken by senior staff and governors. They quickly identify any potential safeguarding or child protection concerns.

Inspection findings

- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are extremely polite and respectful of adults and each other. During break and lunchtime pupils' behaviour is safe, sensible and understanding of others' needs. Pupils move promptly to lessons and arrive ready to learn.
- Pupils are keen to do well and mostly respond well when they are given clear feedback from teachers about how to improve their work. However, in a small minority of subjects, pupils are unsure about how well they are doing in that subject and what they need to do make further progress.

- School leaders carefully check the reliability and accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' progress. The quality of pupils' work and the progress it shows confirm the accuracy of these assessments. School leaders' analysis of the progress of current pupils shows that the very large majority in each year group are on track to meet their challenging targets across a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Pupils who enter the school with low, often very low, starting points, particularly those with weak reading, writing and mathematical skills, are supported very well and make strong progress across the curriculum. Those in Year 8, for example, can describe the marked improvements in their reading that are clearly evident when listening to them read. Those in Year 10 showed good levels of understanding and competence in undertaking mathematical operations and solving complex, worded mathematical problems.
- The most able pupils, including the very small number who are also disadvantaged, are challenged to make strong progress in some subjects, as seen, for example, in their work in music and a Year 9 group in Spanish. However, this good practice has not extended to all subjects and the most able pupils are not challenged well enough to achieve their full potential in some teaching groups in mathematics, philosophy and beliefs, and science.
- Disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as others with similar starting points and are on track to achieve their targets. However, occasionally teachers are not adept at identifying some of these pupils' real potential so that their progress can be accelerated.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well in their subject classes and when they are withdrawn for specific help. As a result, they make strong progress across a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- School leaders have been successful in ensuring that pupils' reading and writing skills are developed in all subjects. Pupils described how teachers in a range of subjects had, for example, helped them to improve their writing, and could show this in their work. They are given many opportunities to write at length about their own ideas and about what they have learned. This is not fully developed in, for example, some science groups to show greater depth in their scientific understanding.
- The close links with a number of primary schools have been used well to ensure that work in lower-school classes builds well on what pupils already know, can do and understand. The strength in the use of a detailed diagnostic analysis in mathematics is a good example.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy being able to join with those from Norton Hill and the opportunities provided by the breadth of the curriculum. They make progress from their starting points in line with students nationally. They also feel that they continue to receive the very high-quality personal support they had in the lower school. This helps them to successfully complete their courses and to develop further as individuals.
- Pupils and sixth-form students are prepared well for their next steps and for life in modern Britain. Pupils are provided with good guidance about post-16 options so that they make well-informed and appropriate decisions. This is clear in the analysis of post-16 destinations information and high retention and success rates

and in the success in attaining places in – often prestigious – higher education institutions for those leaving the sixth form.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the highly effective practice used in some subjects to challenge the most able pupils to make substantial and sustained progress is applied more widely.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the trust, the chairs of the board of trustees and the local governing body, the regional schools commissioner, the Education Funding Agency and the director of children's services for Bath and North East Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, and with the chair, who is also a trustee, and seven other member of the local governing body. Accompanied by senior leaders, inspectors visited lessons in most year groups and across a range of subjects, including a small number of sixth form lessons. In these lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work and talked to them about it. One formal meeting was held with a group of Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils. Informal discussions were held with many other pupils during lesson changeovers, morning break and at lunchtime. Inspectors listened to some pupils read in the morning registration period and in lessons. A range of documents were read, including school policies, the school's self-evaluation and the analysis of assessment, attendance and other information.

Inspectors undertook a range of activities to check the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including reading documents and talking with pupils, teachers, school leaders and governors.

Inspectors took account of the 34 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 32 with additional comments, and the views of nine pupils and 30 staff who completed the appropriate online surveys.

At the start of the inspection, the following lines of enquiry relating to pupils currently in the school were agreed with you and the executive headteacher, and later discussed with governors.

- Is there an effective set of strategies for raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils that is used consistently well by all teachers?

- Are the most able pupils challenged sufficiently to achieve well across a wide range of subjects?
- How well are pupils who have special educational needs supported to make strong progress?
- Do pupils with low starting points make enough progress to enable them to catch up?
- How well is teaching in the sixth form matched to students' prior and current progress and achievement?

It was also agreed that inspectors would look at the strengths identified in the school self-evaluation that could be checked by looking at pupils' work and talking with them about it.

In 2009, Somervale School federated with Norton Hill School to form the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership. The partnership now includes St Dunstan's Secondary School and High Littleton, Clutton, Trinity, Dundry, Longvernal and Welton Primary Schools. The headteacher of Norton Hill is the executive headteacher and chief executive officer for the trust. There is one local governing body for Somervale and Norton Hill schools. There is a joint sixth form, the Midsomer Norton Sixth Form, with teaching on both sites, although students are on roll at one of the schools. The headteacher of Somervale took up post on 1 September 2016. Previously the executive headteacher had led both schools