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6 March 2017

Mrs Patricia Turner
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Dear Mrs Turner

Short inspection of Brackenfield Special School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Janis Warren, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. During a time of turbulence, you have maintained a clear vision and provided strong leadership. You, governors and other school leaders are ambitious for the school and have high expectations of the pupils and the staff. The well-being of each pupil is at the heart of the school's work and you and your staff 'go the extra mile' to ensure that pupils are ready to engage in learning. You work closely with governors to identify school priorities and evaluate aspects of the school's performance. Consequently, governors are further developing their practice in providing support and challenge to leaders.

Since the last inspection, you have successfully restructured your leadership team to ensure that leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of pupils' progress and welfare across the whole school. While you are still going through a period of change, it is evident that this has already been effective and as a result, you and your leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas where further improvement is necessary. For example, you have been quick to establish why pupils' outcomes in mathematics at key stage 4 were below those in English. You have taken rapid action to ensure that pupils across the school are making the progress they should in mathematics and that pupils in Year 11 are on target to reach their expected levels.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve teaching by ensuring greater consistency in feedback to pupils and opportunities to develop their independence, and to improve the effectiveness of subject leadership.

You have undertaken considerable work to address these areas for improvement. You have ensured that a whole-school marking policy is in place, which is fully understood by all staff and pupils. Staff provide feedback to their pupils in a consistent manner throughout the school and across the curriculum. The pupils to whom inspectors spoke showed a good understanding of how well they were achieving. They spoke about what they had learned in the lesson and their next steps. The most able pupils shared their aspirations and goals. For example, in Year 11, pupils spoke about their transition to college after the summer holiday.

You have taken effective steps to ensure that all staff support pupils to become independent learners and gain an appropriate level of independence within the community. Support staff told inspectors that when pupils require additional help, they are used to working with different staff, and so do not become dependent on one person. During learning walks, inspectors observed pupils being supported and challenged to try and do things for themselves wherever possible, before help was offered. As a result, you are preparing pupils well for the next stages in their learning.

You have worked successfully with leaders to develop their skills. All leaders now effectively understand and evaluate the quality of teaching and the progress of all pupils. This has enabled everyone to be clear about the defined steps in pupils' learning which you have identified. As a result, staff are able to quickly identify when a pupil falls behind with their learning and put a strategy in place. It has also provided leaders with secure information to make direct links between effective teaching and good pupil outcomes. However, although staff can identify when pupils are falling behind, this is not consistently the case where pupils could make more than the progress expected of them. You recognise that in some classes, further work is to be done in this regard.

You have developed a culture that ensures that pupils and staff respect each other's rights to be different, to be safe and to learn. You and your leaders promote this through the curriculum, assemblies, displays around the school, and the way staff and pupils address each other and visitors. Staff show a very good understanding of the significant barriers to learning faced by some pupils, and pay high regard to their dignity when giving support.

Governors play an important role in ensuring that you maintain the quality of the school's provision. They understand the strengths of the school and have a clear view of the next steps that need to be taken. They have thought through the leadership structure and provided good support during the period of change. In making recent substantive leadership appointments, they have shown their commitment to, and ambition for, the school. They now need to develop further skills to challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors promote a culture of vigilance among the staff. Safeguarding arrangements and records are fit for purpose. Staff have received up-to-date safeguarding training, including child protection, preventing radicalisation and extremism, and female genital mutilation. Staff are fully aware of the different types of abuse, and the signs to look for in monitoring their pupils' welfare. All staff, including those recently appointed, are fully aware of the actions to take when they have a concern about a pupil's well-being.

You and your senior leaders work closely with parents and local agencies when you have a concern about a pupil's welfare. You do not give up when working to ensure that pupils receive the support they require. You ensure that staff receive regular updates regarding any safeguarding concerns about pupils. You also ensure that all staff fully understand their responsibility to ensure that pupils at your school are safe. This includes being safe when they use the computer and other such devices.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have been swift to review the reasons behind the low outcomes in mathematics compared with English at the end of key stage 4 in the last academic year. The actions they have taken have ensured that a whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics is now in place. Pupils are on track to make similar progress in mathematics and English, and achieve their target grades at the end of key stage 4 this year. Leaders recognise the importance of identifying those pupils who need extra support and taking action to ensure they make good progress,
- Leaders have a rigorous process in place to track and monitor pupils' progress across the curriculum and all phases of the school. They show a good understanding of what the information tells them and what to do next. They recognise, however, that there is more work to be done to ensure that all teachers have a consistent understanding of what good and better progress looks like for their pupils, and therefore to be able to set appropriately challenging targets.
- Owing to the effective support that disadvantaged pupils receive, there is no difference in the progress made by them in comparison with other pupils in the school. Leaders and governors recognise the need for careful evaluation each year to ensure that this continues.
- Leaders have adapted the curriculum and linked assessment to ensure that all pupils can engage in learning effectively, regardless of their difficulties. Learning environments have been developed within classrooms, which enables all pupils to access appropriate and targeted resources within primary and secondary provision, regardless of their age or stage in the school.
- Overall attendance of all pupils is consistently good. If persistent absence is identified, or a pupil is unable to attend due to medical difficulties, school staff work closely with families to provide the support that is needed.

- Behaviour at the school is very good. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. They have very positive attitudes to learning and engage well in the activities they are given to do. Those pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour are monitored closely and receive appropriate support from staff. This support is part of a managed plan that is monitored and evaluated effectively. The number of fixed-term exclusions in the school is rapidly declining.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff fully understand assessment information in relation to pupils who are making better than expected progress
- governors build on the work they are undertaking to ensure that they provide systematic challenge to leaders.

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

Lynda Morgan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders and a selection of staff. We considered the responses to the staff survey. An inspector spoke on the telephone to the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority who supports the school in its improvement work. Inspectors observed lessons in all classes, across the whole school. These observations were conducted with you in your role as headteacher, and with your deputy headteacher. We observed pupils' behaviour before school, during break and at lunchtime. During these occasions, we spoke with pupils. We also spoke to a selection of pupils during lessons and heard pupils read. We spoke with a number of parents on the phone and considered their views alongside the responses from Parent View. We examined a range of school documents, including those related to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the school's use of pupil premium funding, achievement and governance. We took into account the school's own self-evaluation and school improvement plan. We scrutinised the school's single central record and the school's recruitment procedures. Inspectors also reviewed the school's website. At the end of the day, I gave feedback to you, senior leaders and the representative of the local authority.