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Mrs Joy Hardwick
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Joy Hardwick

Short inspection of Oscott Manor School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2017 with David Rzeknik, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have led the school effectively and managed the ongoing challenges that have arisen since the change to your school's designation as a school for pupils with autism. Your calm and quiet determination to improve the school further is evident. You continue to strengthen your leadership team and as a result you and your staff are in a good position to further the drive and vision for the school that you clearly describe for all stakeholders. You know your school very well and where improvements are still needed.

The strong, family atmosphere that you have created for the school is evident. Parents talk in glowing terms about the school and how their children's lives have been transformed. They talk about how approachable the staff are, and say that they receive support not only for their child but for the family as a whole. You and your staff know the pupils very well and your individualised approach has ensured that pupils are provided with an appropriate curriculum that is largely suited to their different needs. Pupils agree that 'they give us the right education according to our levels'.

The strong governing body is supportive of the school but is not afraid to challenge you. They have wide-ranging skills and experience and share your vision for continued improvement. Records of meetings show that governors understand the needs of the school. Regular visits by several governors enable them to check that the good practice you report is evident and sustained.

Leaders and governors recognise that, since the last inspection, pupils are entering school with different needs. This has posed specific challenges for you to address. For example, you have made sure that staff are trained appropriately so that they can support pupils with autism. You have also adapted and changed the school environment to respond to pupils' sensory needs. You recognise that pupils are of a much higher ability than previous cohorts and you have taken steps to recruit staff with the right level of skill to teach pupils at the appropriate level. You have introduced a range of externally accredited courses, including GCSE English and mathematics, as well as BTEC level 1 and 2 qualifications and entry level courses. There is still work to do in this area to make sure that the higher-ability pupils can access a wider range of qualifications. While your internal assessments last year showed that pupils had made good progress, some pupils' examination results in 2016 were not as you had predicted. On reflection, you recognised that pupils had not been prepared well enough to cope with the experience of taking formal examinations. You have taken steps to address this and pupils are now better prepared to cope with the experience of sitting an examination.

While you have made changes to the school building, it is clearly not fit for purpose, which means that you are not able to provide the range of curriculum opportunities that you would like. You have been selected for the Department for Education's Priority Schools Building Programme, which will enable you to improve your learning environment and broaden opportunities for pupils at Oscott Manor school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified that the school needed to provide pupils with greater opportunities to improve their work. In addition, the school needed to further develop opportunities for pupils in key stage 5 to practise life skills. You took effective action to address these areas for development and pupils are learning a range of skills to help them live independently. They are, for example, learning home cooking skills.

Through a series of book trawls and conversations with pupils, you and your staff considered how well pupils were able to respond to assessments of their work. You recognised that pupils were able to contribute to this process and you established a pupil working group. Pupils devised their own self-assessment system, which they called 'selfies', and they presented their ideas to staff and governors. Their system allows them to describe what they think is a good piece of work. Inspectors were able to see the consistent use of 'selfies' in pupils' work books. You have also introduced a system called 'two stars and a wish' which provides pupils with an additional challenge, or an activity to build on prior learning. Pupils respond well to this activity, which helps to consolidate or extend their learning.

The key stage 5 curriculum is much improved and pupils are now provided with a wider range of opportunities to develop their life skills. Leaders have identified a range of appropriately accredited courses in the local area including the horticulture course at Hillcrescent Farm and the 'life and living skills' course at a local college. Some pupils in key stage 4 also participate in the 'Thrive' initiative, involving a weekly visit to a horticultural project where they can attain a City and Guilds qualification. Pupils were able to talk confidently to inspectors about how they had

learned to grow a range of produce and knew about how plants grew. The school's purchase of a polytunnel has allowed pupils to practise these skills on the school site and develop a business enterprise activity. The popular accredited course for home cooking skills enables pupils to learn about how to prepare food from scratch and produce healthy meals. All of these courses provide the skills to enable pupils to develop their independence; one pupil echoed the views of many when he said, 'they teach us how to cope with adult life'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. The staff that inspectors spoke to were clear about what procedures they need to follow if they have any concerns about a pupil. Your commitment to effective safeguarding practice is evident on arrival at school. For example, your administrative staff articulate clear procedures for all visitors. Staff vetting and checking systems are completed. Staff receive regular training and updates about all aspects of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding lead provides regular sessions for part-time staff, or those who may have been absent to catch up. Detailed pupil files show that leaders respond in a timely way to any safeguarding concerns, involving other agencies where appropriate.

Safeguarding is a regular agenda item for discussion at governors' meetings. Safeguarding is woven into the curriculum. You provide a range of meaningful activities, based on current affairs and assemblies, to reinforce messages to pupils about keeping safe. You recognise specific areas of vulnerability for your school and have personalised your practice to help keep pupils safe. The school-specific risk assessment which you use to good effect is a fine example of your recognition of the potential vulnerability of some of your pupils to radicalisation and extremism.

Behaviour observed during the inspection was exemplary. Pupils moved around the school safely and showed respect to others. Pupils who inspectors spoke to were articulate, respectful and confident to share their views about all aspects of the school. Pupils who need additional support in managing their behaviour have individualised management plans. Systems for recording and monitoring behaviour are effective. Governors were able to demonstrate to inspectors how they use this monitoring information to challenge leaders about incidents. Risk assessments of pupils, of activities and of the school environment show that pupils' welfare is paramount.

Parents told inspectors that they believe their children are safe at school and pupils strongly echoed this. Pupils were able to tell inspectors about how they are taught to keep themselves safe and could talk about ways to stay safe on the internet.

Leaders and staff work hard to make sure that all pupils attend school regularly. While attendance is below the national average, absence rates for the significant minority of pupils with complex medical conditions or mental health needs have an impact on overall figures. In addition to the steps you have taken in school to address this, you have sought help from a number of external agencies.

Disappointingly, you have not always received timely or consistent support to help pupils attend more regularly.

Leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe on arrival to school. Staff manage pupils' transition on and off buses effectively. However, inspectors observed that a significant number of pupils arrived late to school because of transport issues. On the day of the inspection, only half of the pupils who use school transport arrived on time. Some were over 30 minutes late. You report that this is an ongoing problem which, despite your best efforts, has still not been resolved. This is resulting in a significant loss of learning time and this issue needs to be addressed by the local authority as a matter of urgency. If not, it will potentially have a serious impact on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection findings

- You and the governing body have continued to improve the school by appointing key members of staff to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. You have raised expectations for pupils to enable them to achieve their potential. Teachers make sure that work is pitched at the right level and pupils are challenged appropriately. Higher-ability pupils are now able to access GCSE English and mathematics courses. This is evident in lessons and in pupils' work. Teachers' questioning of pupils is effective and allows them to check pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Teaching assistants support the pupils well; they make sure that they are focused on achieving their learning objectives but allow the pupils to work as independently as possible.
- Reading is promoted throughout the school and a love of books is modelled by staff for pupils to see. Staff share with pupils the book they are reading at home to foster their enjoyment of the activity. Governors enhance the teaching of reading in the school and provide weekly sessions for small groups of pupils from all key stages. They build pupils' confidence and self-esteem through reading aloud and this is making a difference to pupils' outcomes in both reading and speaking and listening. The 'knit and natter' group which they organise for less confident pupils offers a safe environment for pupils to develop positive relationships and conversational skills.
- Pupils' work in books is well presented and shows good progress over time. However, leaders agreed with inspectors that work in books shows that there is insufficient opportunity for pupils to master the skills they have learned in lessons. Pupils are moving on to the next skill too quickly without consolidating their previous learning. This was most evident in writing tasks, although also true, to some extent, in mathematics.
- Leaders have established clear assessment systems and are able to track pupils' progress from their starting points. Regular moderation takes place both internally and externally, with similar schools. This has allowed staff to make accurate judgements of pupils' performance.
- Leaders and staff have taken steps to address pupils' ability to access externally

accredited courses. You have devised a set of examination entry criteria to assess further pupils' needs and abilities in this area. This is another example of how your personalised approach is having a positive impact on pupils' preparation for the rigours of the examination system.

- While progress is evident in pupils' work, progress measures need to be more robust so that you are able to be clearer about how much progress pupils are making. You are not yet tracking progress in foundation subjects sufficiently and you recognise that this is an area for improvement.
- Leaders have made sure that the curriculum at every key stage is now more suited to the changing needs of the pupils. You have not been afraid to continually review and adapt the curriculum for this purpose. You provide a range of flexible curriculum pathways which cater for all abilities but you recognise the need to provide wider opportunities for the more able pupils to enable them to achieve their potential. Pupils told inspectors that they would like more opportunities to take part in subjects such as food technology and design and technology. Their access to these subjects is restricted owing to the limited resources and space in the school.
- You have introduced the Duke of Edinburgh's Award for all pupils aged 14 and over. Pupils speak highly and enthusiastically about the experience in learning new skills and working in the local community.
- Staff provide a range of lunchtime clubs and activities for the pupils to take part in. Pupils enjoy these but would like further opportunities to take part in more enrichment activities and after-school or holiday clubs. This view was echoed by the parents.
- Over half of the pupils in your school are eligible for pupil premium funding and leaders and governors have a clear strategy for the use of this additional funding. Additional members of staff have been used effectively to reduce group sizes and a range of activities and interventions are making a difference. Catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy has been used to purchase additional laptops and headphones.
- While there is some evidence of interventions making a difference to pupils, leaders and governors recognise that their monitoring of the impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is not yet robust.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems are developed further to ensure that progress and attainment is tracked more effectively, that progress measures are explicit and the impact of additional funding is evaluated
- higher-ability pupils are provided with further opportunities to gain a wider range of accredited qualifications

- the curriculum is further refined to ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to practise what they have learned and allows them to master skills at a greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the last inspection, your school's self-evaluation and agree key lines of enquiry. In order to explore these areas inspectors:

- met with you, the deputy headteacher and designated safeguarding leader and members of the governing body including the chair
- met with the school business manager to review the school's single central record, including sampling of personnel files
- met with groups of parents to discuss their views of the school
- spoke to pupils both formally and informally about their views of the school
- scrutinised a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation document; the school's performance and assessment information; safeguarding documents including behaviour support plans, child protection files, local authority referrals, risk assessments, training records, pupil education plans for children looked after
- visited lessons across all key stages, accompanied by senior leaders
- scrutinised work in books across a range of subjects with senior and middle leaders
- spoke to the school's improvement consultant by telephone.

Inspectors were unable to consider the views of parents from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as there were insufficient responses.