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Dear Mrs Thompson

Short inspection of Old Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 2017 with David Rzeknik, OI, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since joining the school in June 2016, and despite a major flood which closed the school for half a term, you have successfully addressed the weaknesses you inherited. These were in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment, the early years provision and in the effectiveness of leadership and management. You have strengthened both senior and middle leadership teams by appointing new staff and developing the skills of middle leaders.

You have accurately assessed the progress made towards the areas for improvement found at the last inspection. Your evaluation of the school's performance confirmed that the school was underperforming. You and your staff quickly and successfully addressed the issues and now the school is on an upward trajectory. You have accurately identified what actions need to be taken to secure further and continuous improvement. The work in pupils' books shows that these actions are beginning to have a significant impact on pupils' learning and progress across all curriculum areas.

You have developed a staff team which works hard and effectively to match pupils' work to their needs and to improve pupils' learning. Staff appreciate the impact and value of the work you have carried out. They recognise that there have been a lot of changes but as one member of staff said, 'they have been for the better'. One

represented the views of many when saying, 'The school now has a definite focus and all staff have worked tremendously hard to get to where we are now.' You have put in place an effective model for checking the work of staff. You have set high expectations for staff and pupils. As a result, staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and pupils are making good progress from their starting points. This is contributing well to addressing the areas for development identified in the last inspection and to bringing about further improvement.

An increasing number of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties have recently joined the school. This has provided challenges for the school which have been addressed successfully. For example, you and other leaders have worked together to develop a curriculum which enables every pupil to learn at their own appropriate pace, to make progress and achieve success. Teachers use the facilities within the school, such as the hydrotherapy pool and sensory rooms, sensitively and thoughtfully to support pupils' individual development and learning. However, changes to the curriculum are new and still need to be evaluated and, if necessary, adapted.

Personal, social and emotional development is well catered for and is threaded throughout the curriculum. School leaders use the information and targets in the education, health and care plans to plan the curriculum and identify learning activities that meet the individual pupils' needs, abilities and aptitudes. Lessons are delivered effectively by teachers and teaching assistants who know their pupils well and fully cater for their needs. Individual education and learning plans clearly identify pupils' next steps in learning and what they should be learning in class. One pupil said, 'I like the work I am given and the teachers are kind and caring.'

Pupils' behaviour at all times is very good. This creates a positive and supportive learning environment in which pupils are always ready to try their best. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in their school is always good. Staff use de-escalation techniques effectively and the strength of the very positive relationships between staff and pupils is shown in the marked decrease in the number of behaviour incidents since September. You have provided staff training on a range of special educational needs that have helped staff to identify pupils' needs better. As a result, the support pupils receive is more suitable to their needs and helps them make better progress and to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils told inspectors that staff deal with the rare bullying incidents quickly and effectively.

Parents are delighted with the quality of education provided for their children and the level of care from the staff. They feel their children's often very complex needs are met extraordinarily well and that they are making very good progress towards clear objectives which are shared with them. One parent spoke of how her child has been 'transformed' after recently moving to the school.

You and your senior leaders have worked successfully with several other schools to improve teaching and learning and to develop appropriate systems for assessment. As a result, the school's assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and teachers use this information to inform the planning and delivery of learning activities well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff in all areas of the school are very clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Keeping children safe is integral to all the work of the school. Safeguarding systems are securely in place. A single central record of the safeguarding checks on all staff is kept and regularly updated. There are appropriate procedures in place to ensure that all concerns are registered and followed up immediately. When there have been safeguarding incidents, school leaders have followed its own and the local authority's procedures to the letter.

Safeguarding training is regularly provided for all staff who know what to do and whom to contact when they have any concerns. The acting deputy headteacher, who took on the role of the designated safeguarding lead in January 2017, ensures that everyone is kept updated on current themes and issues and that rigorous risk assessments are in place for all activities. She has ensured that all concerns referred to social services or the local authority are followed through and result in actions which support pupils and their parents. Staff teach pupils about the potential risks and dangers they might face. As a result, pupils are kept very safe in school, and when online or on school visits.

The safeguarding governor makes regular visits to the school and takes an active role in monitoring any concerns or records of behaviour incidents. Her findings are reported back to the governing body. This demonstrates her commitment to this role.

The only concern raised to inspectors was about arrangements for the end of the school day when pupils get on school transport. I understand that you are working with the local authority to address this issue and urge you to make all necessary changes as soon as possible.

Inspection findings

- One of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection asked the school to ensure that progress in writing and mathematics is consistent across all classes. Analysis of the school's information about pupils' progress and attainment in different year groups, and work seen in pupils' books confirms that you have thoroughly and successfully addressed this area for improvement across the school.
- The second area for improvement from the previous inspection asked the school to make sure that the work set for pupils was sufficiently challenging so that pupils can achieve as well as they should. Teachers use the information about what pupils know and can do to plan and deliver learning activities that meet pupils' needs and are linked to the pupils' individual education, health and care plans. Objectives are shared with teaching assistants and inform all the activities pupils are following in class. Pupils' progress is measured against these objectives and informs pupils' next steps in learning. This ensures that pupils are following learning pathways which are appropriate to their needs.

- The curriculum meets the needs, abilities, interests and aspirations of all pupils. A wide range of enrichment experiences are enjoyed to the full by the pupils. Careful thought has been given to the best ways to introduce new pupils, especially those with very complex needs, into the school, and how to prepare Year 6 pupils for their move to secondary school. You and your senior leaders have taken time to look at best practice from other schools while looking at what is best for the pupils at Old Hall. Changes to the early years curriculum have been established successfully. However, you acknowledge that curriculum changes in other year groups are not yet being delivered in a consistent manner.
- You and your senior leaders recognise that pupils' attendance in 2016 was lower than that for similar schools. Your acting deputy headteacher has identified the reasons for individual pupils' absence and started to put in place appropriate measures to address this issue and to work with the education welfare officer. You rightly recognise that the medical issues of your increased number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have negatively affected the overall levels of attendance. The attendance of pupils who have other special educational needs, for example severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders, is above the national average for special schools. You and your senior leadership team are clear that there is more work to be done and plan to continue to address this aspect with rigour.
- Additional government funding from the pupil premium and the sports premium has been used effectively on a range of strategies which have been planned to support the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils. You have used the pupil premium to make sure disadvantaged pupils have the speech, language and physiotherapy support that they need. Extra provision, such as music sessions, has also been provided in the school day. Funding from the sports premium has enabled pupils to take part in a range of sports competitions and activities outside of school. You have also used it to employ sports coaches to support teachers to develop their own skills in delivering physical education lessons. You have recognised where some funding has not had the desired impact. For example, you have made changes to the way speech and language support is being provided for pupils. You recognise that senior leaders and governors need to receive greater clarity than they do at the moment about the specific effect all initiatives have had on pupils' outcomes so you can identify what has given good value and is worthwhile to continue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff deliver the curriculum consistently so that pupils make good progress in all subjects
- staff and leaders work with parents and outside agencies to improve the attendance of pupils who are regularly absent
- the impact of additional government funding on pupils' outcomes is routinely and incisively evaluated.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Roalfe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

To explore the main areas of enquiry for this inspection, inspectors:

- met with you, senior leaders, the school staff, governors and a representative from the local authority
- met informally with two parents at the beginning of the school day to discuss their child's welfare and progress
- spoke with pupils informally and met with the school council to discuss their learning and school experiences
- met with staff formally and informally to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection
- scrutinised a range of documents including work in pupils' books, teachers' planning files, curriculum folders, the single central record, safeguarding documents, behaviour and attendance records and the school's system for measuring pupils' progress
- visited lessons across early years and key stages 1 and 2, some with you
- considered the results of a recent parent questionnaire undertaken by the school with 53 responses, the views of five parents who contacted Ofsted through the online questionnaire Parent View and the 17 responses from staff to the online staff questionnaire.