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Mr David Parry
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Dear Mr Parry

Short inspection of Penn Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 2017 with Simon Mosley HMI, 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 outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils thrive at Penn Hall School. Outcomes are very strong across each phase of learning. Leaders and governors are very committed to continual improvement.

Penn Hall is an inspirational organisation. The overall learning experience is rich and diverse. The school grounds are impressive. Pupils have access to adapted play grounds, a zip wire, the 'rebound pod', a hydrotherapy pool, a smallholding and substantial, well-maintained grounds. The school works closely with a wealth of agencies and specialists that provide excellent support and guidance for staff and pupils. Other professionals, including speech and language therapists, are very proud of their joint working and the substantial difference they make to pupils' lives and their achievement.

Leaders and governors understand the strengths of their school exceptionally well. Their school self-evaluation rightly celebrates all that is working well and does not shy away from the key areas that leaders wish to develop further. Staff are receptive to feedback and are keen to celebrate what they do in class and improve provision if needs be.

The quality of teaching has improved even further since the last inspection as a result of excellent staff training. Teachers have opportunities to learn alongside

skilled heads of school. Staff are focused relentlessly on meeting the specific needs of every child to ensure that they make the best possible progress, both academically and in their personal development. Penn Hall is a very inclusive organisation.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to further improve the quality of teaching for pupils with the most complex difficulties by making use of prior learning to plan activities in small steps, developing the contribution of teaching assistants and encouraging and promoting pupils' independence. Leaders have ably tackled these areas for improvement.

All staff carefully assess pupils' progress throughout lessons. Information is used to adapt activities and plan the next steps in learning effectively. Leaders also hold regular pupil-progress meetings with teachers to make checks on the progress that pupils are making and devise suitable additional support in response to any underachievement. Teaching assistants play a very valuable role in supporting pupils' progress. They understand the needs of pupils exceptionally well. Teaching assistants challenge and support pupils with a range of questions. They skilfully intervene, at the right moment, to move pupils' learning on and encourage independence, so that they can think and learn by themselves. As a result of highly effective support and planning, the vast majority of pupils make excellent progress and secure strong outcomes given their different starting points.

Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about school life. Inspectors received a wide range of comments, emails and feedback from stakeholders. The vast majority of parents are happy with the standard of education and quality of care. One parent commented, 'All staff go above and beyond for the pupils, we feel extremely fortunate to be part of the Penn Hall family.' A pupil told inspectors via technology that he enjoys 'friends, lessons and technological stuff'. Indeed, since the last inspection, the school has been accredited with an award for its effective and forward-thinking use of technology.

Changes in the curriculum and assessment at a national level have presented all schools with an opportunity to review key aspects of their practice in recent years. While Penn Hall has embraced these changes, leaders recognise that there is more to do in establishing an assessment system that more fully meets the needs of their community of learners. Inspectors found variation in assessment practice and scope for staff to share what works best for them even more widely. While this variation is important in some cases, for example in accommodating and recognising the very wide range of pupils' abilities, it is possible to streamline systems further. Further developments will serve to enhance the school's tracking and target-setting procedures, thereby supporting the possibility of even better outcomes in the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team have ensured that systems to keep pupils safe and secure are robust and fit for purpose. Staff are well trained to identify and act upon any child

protection concerns. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through the school's curriculum. This includes travel training for older pupils and a programme of learning about sex and relationships. Pupils that inspectors spoke to are able to recall this learning and say that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection I met with you and leaders to agree key lines of enquiry to evaluate during the day. The first key line of enquiry was to review the extent to which pupils are supported to attend regularly. The school monitors attendance carefully and has appointed a family liaison officer to oversee improvements in this area. Families are effectively supported to secure regular attendance and to keep persistent absence to a minimum. Taking into account specific individual cases, rates of attendance are better than at the time of the previous inspection.
- We reviewed the extent to which staff effectively make use of assessment information to inform planning and ensure that work is matched to pupils' differing capabilities. While we found many aspects of effective practice, there is some variation across the school. This is in part due to systems that have been introduced in different parts of the school over time and changes at a national level. There is now scope to review practice more fully and take stock of what works best for pupils. Some highly effective practice is not yet shared widely enough.
- Support staff have a significant impact on pupils' progress. Inspectors observed the youngest children progressing rapidly with number identification and communication as a result of excellent questioning and intervention. Similarly in lower school, we observed very enthusiastic and skilled staff supporting pupils in the 'rebound therapy pod'. Pupils' physical and sensory needs are well supported in this innovative aspect of the provision.
- Support staff understand pupils' needs exceptionally well. They use this understanding to intervene in learning at the right time, presenting pupils with choices, and targeting pupils' next developmental steps so that they make the progress of which they are capable.
- Additional funding is used very well to support pupils' pastoral and academic development effectively. Specialist equipment has been purchased for use within pupils' homes to extend learning and promote independence beyond the school. A family liaison officer has been appointed to improve attendance. They have had a very positive impact and provide advocacy and a dedicated point of contact for families. The physical education and sport premium funding has been used to increase sport participation, including attendance at inter-school tournaments. Penn Hall pupils are keen table-cricket players. Pupils came second in this year's regional final and have also attended Lord's cricket ground in London to compete at a national level.
- Leaders have identified writing as a key area of development this year. Following a successful drive to improve phonics and pupils' reading skills, teachers are also driving forward improvements in pupils' writing. During the inspection, pupils

were observed writing about their recent visit to Warwick Castle. Pupils were accurately constructing sentences about soldiers' shields and the birds of prey that they had encountered on their tour. A range of technology and resources were effectively used, by all staff, to secure rapid rates of progress. As a result of highly skilled teaching from all staff and an excellent learning environment, pupils were independently recording their experiences and rapidly developing their writing skills.

- Outcomes across the school are very strong. Pupils make substantial and sustained progress across every phase. All groups of pupils perform well as a result of excellent teaching. A very high proportion of pupils meet and exceed the challenging targets that are set for them. Since the last inspection, every pupil who leaves Penn Hall has moved onto further education, employment or training.
- Governors offer strong support and challenge to leaders. The governing body are passionate and knowledgeable. They share the commitment to inclusivity. Governors have established a range of 'link' roles to enhance their understanding of the school and offer an even higher level of support to ensure that the quality of education constantly improves. Governors understand the challenges faced by the school very well and monitor improvements carefully through their regular meetings.
- The local authority works closely with the school to review their work and broker reciprocal support from other local schools. This work has helped leaders accurately to review their overall strengths and areas for development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems are developed further by:
 - reviewing the impact of current policies and practice
 - sharing the best assessment practice more widely across the school
 - refining processes for recording what pupils can do and what they need to do next.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the school's residential provision. A separate report is available for the social care inspection.

I met with the leadership team to review the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans. Together we agreed the key lines of enquiry to ascertain the extent to which an outstanding standard of education has been maintained.

An inspector met with the school's business manager and family liaison officer to review the single central record and a range of safeguarding information. Safeguarding information shared with the team included child protection plans, risk assessments and training records.

We conducted learning walks in each phase of the school. These were undertaken jointly with leaders. We also held separate meetings to review assessment information and scrutinise the impact of additional funding.

I held a meeting with five governors including the chair and vice-chair of governors. I also met with a representative from Wolverhampton local authority.

We took account of the 28 responses to Parent View and 14 free-text responses submitted by parents online during the inspection.