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Mrs Julie Barnes
Headteacher
Birtenshaw School
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Dear Mrs Barnes

Short inspection of Birtenshaw School

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 2017 with Michelle Beard, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have faced ongoing challenges since your appointment as headteacher. The number of pupils on roll has increased significantly and you are dealing with an increased number of local authorities who place pupils in your care. Despite the recurring need to recruit and train staff to accommodate increased pupil numbers, you have maintained the overall effectiveness of the provision. Your staff have an excellent understanding of individual pupils' needs and are well trained to deal with challenging behaviour when it arises. Pupils often arrive at Birtenshaw when their education at previous settings has failed. As a result of effective support and a passion for pupils to succeed, you are skilled at putting pupils back on the right path to achieve good progress. Pupils follow highly structured routines and are well supported to achieve success. You have created a welcoming, calm and supportive environment where pupils feel safe and happy.

At the previous inspection, the inspector reported strengths in the quality of teaching, the management of behaviour, improvements made to the curriculum and partnership working with health and other agencies. These strengths have been maintained. The previous inspection reported improvements needed in:

- support staff not intervening too soon

- adults using signs and symbols more consistently to communicate
- ensuring that the pace of learning allows pupils to maintain concentration
- the recording of pupils' achievements
- leadership of the curriculum.

You have addressed these issues successfully. Support staff now intervene in a more timely fashion. They use effective questioning to guide pupils towards learning outcomes as opposed to providing the answers for them. The use of signs and symbols to communicate is used consistently across the school, so that pupils maintain focus and know what is expected of them. The pace of learning observed in lessons is appropriate; support staff help to move learning along where needed. Leaders now have a more robust oversight of the curriculum and it has developed well since the last inspection.

We discussed how whole-school targets you set for improvement need to be more sharply focused and that they need to take more account of the intended impact of your work.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are well-established procedures in place to keep pupils safe, for example the checks made on new members of staff before they are allowed to work in school. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and are aware of the procedures should they suspect any pupil to be at risk. This training is also completed with new staff during their induction period. You have detailed records on all pupils which highlight any risks which staff and visitors need to be aware of and how to manage these. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through the curriculum, learning about e-safety and safe relationships.

The school site is safe and there is an evident safeguarding culture. Regular checks and risk assessments of the site and building are completed. Records show that you follow up any reported concerns and involve other agencies where required to ensure that pupils are protected from harm.

Inspection findings

- Teachers have a clear overview of the curriculum and work in pupils' books shows that they learn a range of skills within it. The tasks set for pupils are mainly matched to their abilities and where they are unsure, support staff provide effective support to keep pupils on track. We did discuss that in a minority of cases, tasks could be more closely matched to individual pupils' abilities. Support staff are well trained to deal with the complex additional needs of your pupils. Staff know individual pupils very well and use a wide range of techniques and activities to support pupils in their learning. Teachers follow the agreed policy for marking and feedback.
- The whole-school curriculum has evolved well since the last inspection. Pupils are able to access a wider range of subjects and there are more opportunities for

pupils to complete accredited qualifications. Pupils have opportunities to consolidate their learning and to transfer their skills within school and in the local community. For example, pupils use their knowledge of weight and measures when cooking and visit local shops to purchase items when learning about money. Teachers work well together to organise plans so that a broad range of learning is planned. We discussed how plans could include more opportunities for pupils to demonstrate independence in their learning.

- Many pupils join Birtenshaw having had challenging and negative experiences in other schools. A real strength of your work is how you overcome any initial barriers to learning and allow pupils to settle back into education. There is clear evidence of your success in reducing the regularity of challenging behaviour over time. This is further confirmed by the very low numbers of pupils who are excluded from school; no pupils have been excluded in the past year. Pupils are taught to self-regulate their behaviour and when emotions are heightened, they are able to make informed choices, which allows tensions to settle. Academic progress observed in lessons and in pupils' books is good.
- The governing body has been through a recent period of instability. You have been successful in recruiting new governors who represent the full range of stakeholders in the school. Governors are fulfilling their statutory functions. However, the support and challenge provided to school leaders comes from a minority of governors at present. You are aware that new governors will need time to develop before they can contribute as well as those with more experience.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement planning is sharpened so that priorities are more focused and the impact of planned actions is more easily measured
- pupils are provided with more opportunities to develop their independence.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We held discussions with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, the acting chair of the governing board, the school improvement adviser, a range of teaching staff and several pupils.
- We observed lessons in the vast majority of classes, two of which were observed jointly with you.
- We sampled pupils' work in a range of subjects.
- We observed behaviour around the school, in lessons, at breaks and at lunchtime.
- We considered responses to surveys from staff and parents.
- We scrutinised a wide range of management documentation provided by leaders, including that related to safeguarding, governance, school development planning and pupils' outcomes.