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Mrs Christine Inchley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Inchley

### **Short inspection of Stour Valley Community School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2017 with Gwyneth Gibson 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 good in July 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, leaders and governors ensure that treating pupils as individuals and developing a community ethos throughout the school are at the heart of your work. Pupils are confident, achieve well, and understand important values in society. You have been determined to stay true to this caring community ethos, despite the popularity of the school and the increasing numbers of pupils on roll. Most parents, pupils and staff appreciate these values, and many are effusive in their praise for both the school and your leadership.

Since the previous inspection, the achievement of your first three cohorts of Year 11 pupils has been increasingly strong year-on-year. In 2015, pupils made much better progress than pupils did nationally in English and mathematics. In 2016, pupils' progress in science, mathematics and humanities was significantly above the national average. Despite these clear strengths, you continue to identify areas where progress is not yet as good as it could be, and look for ways that you could improve the school.

Vitally, your integrity and diligent self-evaluation are main influences in ensuring that Stour Valley continues to improve. You have a thorough understanding of the provision and this allows you to continue to bring secure and sustained improvements. You use this knowledge, and your thorough monitoring systems, to

identify pupils early on who may need additional support to catch up, or who are vulnerable to underachieving.

You work very well with your skilled and insightful governing body to ensure that they are critical friends, who support but challenge you and your leaders to continue to do better for the young people in your care.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that the records of checks carried out on staff are appropriate. Staff are well trained in the most up-to-date guidance, including that related to the anti-radicalisation of pupils. Referrals both in the school and to children's services are timely and effective.

Pupils access a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum which covers a broad range of topics related to pupils' safety and development. Pupils are taught how to stay safe in the community, in relationships, in their personal hygiene and health, and online.

When reviewing documentation, you acknowledged that while the files for the most vulnerable pupils in the school are kept diligently, there are aspects of the record-keeping that are not as detailed. Most notably, this was the case for the ongoing monitoring of pupils who exhibited lower levels of concern.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry was to review how leaders are securing improved progress for disadvantaged pupils. Although disadvantaged pupils made progress that was broadly in line with the national average in 2016, they are not yet securing rapid enough progress so that they attain higher grades more in line with other pupils nationally. In particular, disadvantaged pupils from lower starting points in mathematics did not make good progress. Equally, their absence as a group is much higher than the national average.
- This year, you have worked quickly with the high-performing mathematics team to drive up standards for the least able disadvantaged pupils. You have also developed a new whole-school monitoring system to get a more holistic picture of pupils' needs, aspirations and abilities, and allocate funding even more specifically. In particular, you are focusing on raising disadvantaged pupils' attendance.
- Leaders' efforts to further raise standards for disadvantaged pupils' are an ongoing focus for the school. You have identified that some of this recent work is not yet fully embedded and is only showing early signs of impact. Additionally, disadvantaged pupils' attendance, while improving considerably this year, is likely to remain lower than the national average when it is published for 2017.
- My second line of enquiry was to review the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but do not have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. In 2015, Year 11 pupils made progress that was above the national average for that year. However, in

2016, they did not make the progress of which they were capable. Moreover, pupils' levels of absence were higher than other pupils nationally.

- Together we identified that high-quality teaching, learning and assessment in lessons are supporting most of these pupils to make stronger progress. Actions to improve attendance are also bringing about improvements this year.
- However, we also identified that leaders' central monitoring and advice to teachers about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not consistently thorough, both academically and pastorally. In particular, this guidance and monitoring are not ensuring that the least able pupils build self-assurance, resilience and a confidence in articulating their understanding of the wider world as well as they should.
- The final lines of enquiry focused on leaders' development of the curriculum, to support pupils academically and pastorally. You have developed a wider range of curriculum courses to meet the growing needs of your expanding pupil population. For example, your recent monitoring information has shown early signs that some boys are not making the rapid progress of which they are capable. Consequently, leaders are undertaking a thorough review of the curriculum to look at ways that they could engage these boys further.
- You have been tenacious in providing qualifications for pupils that you feel are pertinent to them, even when this sometimes impacts negatively on your published information. You resolutely stand by the fact that the qualifications that pupils sat in 2016, while not all counting in your published information about school achievement, were right for your pupils who had already started those courses.
- You have now ensured that you have thoroughly checked and chosen courses that do count in the published data for 2017, but that also are right for your current pupils. Pupils are enjoying and learning well in these areas.
- You have taken action to improve the popularity and quality of the provision for modern foreign languages in the school, including the introduction of Spanish. This is starting to show signs of real improvement both in pupils' views and in pupils' achievement.
- Your tenacity in raising the quality of science has ensured that this subject is now a real strength in the school's provision where pupils achieve very well. Leaders and teachers in science ensure that pupils receive high-quality provision, both in and out of the classroom.
- Pupils access an array of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities. These opportunities enrich the curriculum, and raise pupils' enjoyment of science in the wider world. Leaders and governors actively review this curriculum to ensure that it is relevant to skilled employment and training opportunities in the locality.
- Although your pupils' entry points in Year 7 have been increasing year-on-year, you identified that the average starting point of your current Year 7 was not as strong. Subsequently, you and your governors have been increasing your work with local primary schools to develop a more joined-up, all-through experience for pupils. In part, this has led to your trust members developing the Stour Valley

Educational Trust into a multi-academy trust, and a local primary school joining the trust.

- In response to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection, you use your learning communities and training opportunities to share good practice in teaching, learning and assessment across the school. You are ensuring that staff focus on the school's priorities, so that these transfer directly into practice in the classroom. Teaching, learning and assessment remain high quality in most lessons.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the monitoring and actions of leaders secure consistently high-quality support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that these pupils build further confidence and resilience, and achieve and attend well
- they continue to embed school strategies so that disadvantaged pupils make more rapid progress and so that their attendance continues to rise
- all safeguarding records are maintained as diligently as the best ones.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we spoke with you, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and some of your staff. We also met with representatives from the governing body, and from the Stour Valley Educational Trust. We visited classrooms with senior leaders and reviewed pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. We also undertook a detailed work scrutiny of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. We spoke with pupils throughout the day and formally met and spoke to some pupils from key stages 3 and 4. We took account of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 70 parents, as well as 42 staff responses. We also reviewed a range of school documentation, including information relating to school development planning, self-evaluation, the spending of additional funding related to pupil premium, special educational needs, safeguarding and pupils' progress.