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Mr John Somers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Somers

Short inspection of The Wyvern School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Simon Yates, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is a happy, caring place. Pupils and staff forge positive relationships. Pupils' learning and development needs are typically catered for well. Pupils behave well and make good progress.

Since taking up post a year ago, you have brought a fresh approach to leadership and notable positive change. You have raised expectations and established a shared vision for a curriculum highly tailored to pupils' individual development needs. You are working effectively to bring this vision about.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted the many strengths of the school. They identified two aspects requiring specific attention. One was to ensure that teaching consistently met pupils' communication needs. The second was to strengthen leaders' use of monitoring and evaluation to aid school improvement. Pupils' communication needs are now routinely well developed. Staff skilfully use a wide range of approaches and techniques that are fitting for pupils' different needs. You are working effectively to sharpen leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching, making good use of a recently bought software package. It is now easier for leaders to organise, pull together and evaluate information about teaching and pupils' progress. You recognise that assessment and monitoring need further development to ensure that leaders and governors have a consistently deep understanding of every aspect of the school's performance.

Over the last year, you have worked successfully in consultation with staff, parents and pupils to devise a new curriculum approach, your aim being to cater more precisely for pupils' differing development and learning needs so that they make consistently strong progress across the school. The new model is now in operation. You are on the way to realising your aims. However, more work is needed to ensure that the new curriculum promotes a consistently high degree of progress across the school. Teachers who have moved from teaching individual subjects to teaching across the curriculum are inevitably still adjusting to the changes. Additionally, some new curriculum plans are not precise enough to ensure teaching that sharply focuses on meeting pupils' differing learning needs.

The new curriculum introduced in the sixth form is much better tailored to individual students' needs than was previously the case and ensures that they are better prepared for adulthood than in the past. However, students with the potential to progress into supported employment still have quite limited opportunities to gain work experience that enables them to do so.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are alert to any sign that a pupil might be at risk. Staff know and follow the correct procedures for passing concerns to the leaders responsible for safeguarding. No concern is thought too insignificant.

Leaders work effectively together and with outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Checks on the suitability of staff are very thorough. Leaders check attendance and reasons for pupils' absence rigorously to make sure that they spot any patterns of attendance that might indicate that a pupil may be at risk.

External reviews of safeguarding help governors check that arrangements are effective. Leaders act swiftly on any recommendations for improvement, for example, in introducing a 'lockdown' procedure in response to a review carried out in the summer term.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we discussed the reasons for the recent curriculum changes and agreed to look at how successfully these are being implemented. We also agreed to explore the extent to which pupils' communication needs are being met and the effectiveness of leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching and other aspects of the school's performance. The extent to which the new sixth-form curriculum is preparing pupils well for adulthood was also considered important to explore.
- Leaders are putting in place a curriculum that is more highly attuned to pupils' individual learning and developmental needs. Leaders worked effectively over the last academic year to establish a shared vision for the new curriculum across the

school community. The rationale for the changes is sound.

- The new curriculum has less focus on specific subjects and an increased focus on broad developmental areas and individual needs. Pupils now have one main teacher and each class is based in one room for most lessons. Previously, secondary-aged pupils in particular would often move rooms to learn different subjects throughout the day. Encouragingly, the notable reduction in movement times between lessons has created a calmer, more focused atmosphere. However, less than a week in, it is too soon to judge the effect of the new curriculum on pupils' progress.
- Unsurprisingly, such big changes have brought some teething problems. The extent to which teaching has been adjusted to the demands of the new curriculum is quite variable. Leaders know that they need to do further work to ensure that teachers and support staff have a consistently precise understanding of the intended learning for each unit of work for pupils of differing abilities. More work is also needed to ensure consistently high-quality assessment of pupils' progress across the curriculum. Leaders at all levels are acutely aware of the pressing need to resolve this.
- Pupils' communication skills are developed effectively throughout the school day. Staff are highly attuned to individual pupils' communication needs and ensure that these are met. Staff and pupils routinely make good use of signing and communication devices.
- Leaders have introduced a new target-setting, teaching and assessment approach for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), focused on communication and emotional development. This is helping staff gain a sharp understanding of the precise next steps for pupils in relation to their starting points and enabling very effective teaching.
- Last spring, leaders introduced an improved, electronic approach to recording and evaluating information about the quality of teaching. This is helping leaders and governors sharpen their understanding of strengths and areas for development. Leaders rightly recognise the need to tighten further monitoring and evaluation to ensure the success of the new curriculum. Suitable plans are being developed and implemented to this end.
- Leaders have made important changes to the sixth form over the last year. The curriculum is now more suited to catering for individual pupils' development needs and longer-term goals. The sixth-form leader is working effectively to identify and provide opportunities for students to experience volunteering and the world of work. However, she recognises that it is early days and is rightly frustrated about the paucity of opportunities to tap into in the local area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all aspects of the new curriculum are equally well planned, so that staff are routinely clear about the intended learning for pupils of differing abilities in each

lesson, so that they can teach and support pupils accordingly

- assessment is used highly effectively across the school, so that leaders and teachers have a precise understanding of the impact of the entire curriculum and teaching on pupils' development
- monitoring and self-evaluation provide a routinely incisive insight into all aspects of the school's performance, so that any matter for attention is spotted and tackled effectively
- students in the sixth form have a wide range of opportunities to experience work and volunteering that lead to employment and/or volunteering, suited to their needs and aspirations.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. During the day, I held further discussions with you. I met with the chair and two other members of the governing body. Inspectors observed teaching in 15 lessons jointly with a leader. We also scrutinised pupils' work and progress files with school leaders. We took account of 27 staff survey responses and 12 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including nine free-text responses. Inspectors spoke with parents before school and with staff and pupils at lunchtime. Inspectors analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and procedures. A meeting was held with the local authority officer linked to the school.