

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Mark Ruffett
Headteacher
Selworthy Special School
Selworthy Road
Taunton
Somerset
TA2 8HD

Dear Mr Ruffett

Short inspection of Selworthy Special School

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Paul Smith, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Despite some recent turbulence in school staffing and changes in the leadership team, the good quality of education has been maintained since the last inspection. This is because you work in an open and collegiate way with your leaders and other staff. You work effectively with staff, ably supported by your deputy headteachers, to develop practice that improves the quality of education pupils receive. Your willingness to challenge less than good teaching, alongside your approach to develop the practice of staff, has ensured that teaching is typically good.

The previous inspection recommended that leaders improved the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that pupils are aware of their next steps in learning and for teaching assistants to intervene more quickly to support pupils when required. This you have achieved successfully. The changes you have made ensure that pupils have a much stronger understanding of what they know and can do. This is because staff use a range of communication tools to aid pupils' understanding and identify their next steps, such as written, verbal and the use of sign language feedback. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively. They have a good understanding of the needs of the pupils and are skilled in knowing when to intervene and when to allow pupils to work with independence. This enables pupils to make strong progress from often extremely low starting points.

You are well supported by governors, who have a good understanding of the school. Governors have a range of skills and expertise and take their roles and responsibilities seriously. They are fully aware of current improvement priorities and

are supportive of the direction you want to take the school. Governors provide you with a good balance of challenge and support. This is because you have an open dialogue with governors. They use other sources of information, such as progress information and their own visits to the school, to confirm what they have been told.

You and your deputy headteachers welcome external support in order to drive forward school improvement. You make good use of your education adviser and other external support, such as challenge partners, to improve the work of the school.

Most parents are positive about the quality of education and care that their children receive at the school. Inspectors received many positive comments, which include 'We are so happy with what the school has to offer and we feel so fortunate to have this schooling available to us', 'The school is strongly led and all the staff are especially supportive' and 'This school is outstanding in its hard work, I have absolutely no reason to complain at all.' However, a small number of parents did raise some concerns. Leaders are aware that they need to improve communication to ensure that all parents fully understand the school's work and are confident that Selworthy School provides the best education and care for their children.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe; the impact of leaders in ensuring that pupils receive an effective education; how teaching promotes good learning; how well leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils and how effectively pupils are prepared for their future destinations. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, other staff and governors take your safeguarding responsibilities seriously. The nature of your school means that all of the pupils are vulnerable. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from all possible risks. Staff receive effective training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. Controversial issues are not avoided. Staff have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Consequently, staff are quickly able to spot concerns and take the necessary action with confidence.

Leaders and managers fully understand the importance of recruiting staff safely. The checks undertaken are stringent. This ensures that all staff are carefully vetted prior to commencing employment to confirm that they are suitable to work with children.

All visitors are carefully checked on arrival and made aware of the school's safeguarding expectations when they sign in, for example not using personal mobile phones while on the premises.

Pupils who spoke to inspectors reported that they feel safe in school. This is

because they are well supported by staff. Pupils say, 'The staff are kind and look after us.'

Attendance is carefully monitored by leaders. You work with parents and outside agencies to encourage regular attendance. However, you have correctly identified that further work needs to be undertaken to improve pupils' attendance.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection a new leadership team has been established. Together, you have wasted no time in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and school development plans demonstrate how you are addressing the areas that require improvement. You are ambitious for the school and share with leaders, staff and governors the determination to drive forward improvements quickly.
- Indeed, you know that sixth-form provision needs to be swiftly improved. This is because the students are not making the same good progress as other pupils across the school. In particular, the most able students are not consistently provided with activities which challenge them. Consequently, this group do not achieve their academic potential. You have secure plans in place to eradicate the identified weaknesses quickly.
- You and your leaders track the learning and progress of pupils carefully. You undertake a good range of monitoring activities which include learning walks, work scrutinies and lesson observations. You provide opportunities for staff to develop and improve their practice through carefully planned professional development. As a result, teaching is strong.
- Subject leaders have the skills and expertise to carry out their roles effectively. However, they do not have sufficient opportunity to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work to identify what is working well and why.
- The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, with a focus on communication, reading, writing and mathematics. For example, an older pupil read to inspectors with confidence. They were able to talk about preferred authors and styles of books, commenting on how 'films are so different to the books I read.' Subjects including history, geography, religious education and modern foreign languages are studied through a topic approach. For example, pupils learn about 'our world'.
- The school adapts the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of each individual pupil. Pupils' education, health and care plan requirements are reflected in their programmes of study. There are five key areas of learning, which include: cognition and learning; communication and interaction; self-help and independence; sensory and physical; and social and emotional well-being. These areas are carefully interwoven in their learning. As a result, pupils typically make good progress.
- Pupils have access to a wide range of additional activities. For example, the joy in the early morning wake and shake session was palpable. Pupils are able to take part in this activity regardless of special educational need or disability. In addition, pupils have the chance to take part in school productions such as 'Shrek

and 'The Snowman'. Inclusion in such activities raises pupils' confidence and self-esteem, which has a positive impact on the progress they make.

- Pupils are well prepared for their future destinations. Pupils are provided with high-quality work placements. For example, pupils work at a garage to get experience in car mechanics, or in a local shopping store. As a result, all pupils move on successfully to further education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- sixth-form provision is improved quickly so that students make the best possible progress and achieve their full academic potential
- subject leaders have increased opportunity to monitor and evaluate the quality of education so they know what does or does not work well and why
- there is a continued focus on improving the attendance of pupils
- communication with parents is further enhanced to help them better understand the work of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your deputy headteachers. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection. We viewed learning at both the primary and secondary sites. We also held discussions with governors, middle leaders and staff. A phone call was held with an education adviser from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils and listened to them read.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. Inspectors also checked the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements.

We spoke to parents during the day and took into account the 20 responses to the online survey 'Parent View' and considered additional comments received from parents via the free-text message service and other correspondence. Inspectors also considered the 23 responses received from staff.