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Dear Miss Stanley

Short inspection of Penn Fields School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2018 with Sarah Ashley, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You, together with other leaders and governors, have made sure that the school's many strengths have been sustained and built upon. You have focused closely on improving teaching and learning. The impact shows in the strong progress that pupils are currently making, both in their academic achievements and in their personal and social development. It confirms that there is clear capacity for even further improvement.

Penn Fields is a happy, relaxed and friendly school. My colleague and I were made very welcome by the staff and pupils. The pupils are invariably polite, respectful and responsive, keen to talk about their school. They behave very well indeed in all circumstances – they move up and down stairs, for example, carefully and with consideration for others. They listen and watch attentively during assembly, giving those pupils who are speaking the time and space to present their ideas to the whole school. Pupils come in to school happily in the morning, greeting members of staff cheerfully. They settle down quickly and are ready to learn. Older pupils look out for younger ones. 'Peer Supporters' are on hand to help others. One pupil said: 'Our school is like a big family, really.'

The atmosphere in school is warm and supportive. There is a positive climate for learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and mutually respectful. When asked what they liked most about their school, the first thing that pupils mentioned was their teachers.

Penn Fields has the strong support of parents and carers. Those parents who completed questionnaires and those who spoke to inspectors at the start of the day were highly positive about the school, the staff and how their children are progressing. A typical quote was: 'Staff work so hard to build not only on academic ability but also confidence and life skills.'

You, other leaders and governors have enabled this to happen. You know the school and its strengths very well and are ambitious for the pupils. Your self-evaluation is accurate and based on firm evidence. Governance is also strong. Governors are well informed about the school's strengths and areas for development. They play a full part in moving things forwards.

You are keen to guide and support others. Your staff's expertise is often sought by other schools. The highly regarded outreach programme is a good example of this. In addition, you constantly seek to extend staff's skills and knowledge in order to improve what is offered to Penn Fields pupils. For example, staff have received training in emotional literacy, speech therapy and play therapy. As a result, your staff are well placed to meet the wide range of pupils' needs.

Aspects mentioned as needing further development at your last inspection have been successfully dealt with. Teaching has improved strongly, and pupils' progress has increased a great deal as a result. Teachers make sure that pupils are given appropriately challenging work, matched to their prior attainment. Pupils who spoke to me said that they sometimes get stuck, but that their teachers will always help them to understand their work. They realise that getting stuck is part of learning. Pupils receive appropriate support in lessons and are expected to become increasingly independent over time. Preparing pupils as well as possible for their next steps after school is one of your key priorities. Classrooms and outdoor areas are very well organised and provide bright and purposeful environments for learning. Reading areas in particular are bright and inviting.

You and other leaders understand fully the aspects of the school's work that need to be focused on in future. You and the staff team have responded well to the challenges of assessing the achievement of pupils whose attainment almost always does not match the national expectations for their age. You have developed your own assessment criteria and measures of progress. You know that this relatively new system for assessing and tracking pupils' achievement is not yet firmly established as part of the school's routines. In addition, it has not been in place long enough for you to see how well it reflects the progress that pupils are making towards their targets. You also know that there is scope to adjust the curriculum in the sixth form to take even more account of students' aspirations, and to make sure that students' progress from their individual starting points is tracked precisely.

Safeguarding is effective

There is a very strong safeguarding culture at Penn Fields. You, other leaders and governors make sure that protecting pupils and keeping them safe is a key priority for everyone, in recognition of the additional needs and vulnerabilities of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and the leadership team have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Your designated lead person for safeguarding is very able and knowledgeable. She understands the challenges that children and families face. She is tenacious in her work with parents, the local authority and other agencies and always puts the pupils' needs first. She always strives to get the best possible outcomes for the pupils. As well as providing a comprehensive training programme for staff, she checks up to make sure that everyone has understood and knows exactly what to do should they have a concern, however minor. Records of individual cases are detailed and thorough. They are kept in a secure online system, backed up by well-organised paper records, and give a comprehensive chronological account of all actions that have been taken and the outcomes. The school's procedures are regularly audited both by the governing body and external agencies.

Pupils are taught to understand risk and how to keep themselves safe in different situations. Relevant matters relating to keeping pupils safe and promoting their well-being permeate subjects and topics of the curriculum. Parents, staff and pupils raised no concerns about safeguarding. Pupils said they feel safe and well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils achieve very well at Penn Fields. Your assessments of pupils' progress over time, using your previous tracking system, and the work in pupils' books currently show that pupils make strong progress from their starting points in a range of subjects. Teachers know the pupils and their capabilities very well. They use this knowledge to plan tasks and activities that are well matched to what the pupils need to learn next, taking account of the targets that have been set for them. Staff intervene quickly to make sure that any pupil who is in danger of falling behind gets the support they need to help them overcome any difficulties.
- At the end of key stage 4, pupils are entered for examinations and assessments at levels that match their potential, in both academic and vocational subjects. In 2017, the pupils' results were the best ever for the school. Every pupil attained at least one recognised qualification. Some did particularly well, attaining GCSE passes at good grades in computing, English, mathematics, science, art and Punjabi. Pupils also achieved success in gaining awards for personal and social development, life skills and preparation for work. All pupils went on to college, other placements or joined the sixth form, and none have dropped out.
- You have recently adopted a new online system for recording and tracking pupils' attainment and measuring their progress. It supports the work that subject leaders have carried out to break down the national curriculum programmes of study into smaller steps ('I can' statements) that show where pupils are in

relation to the expectations for their age. The system has a great deal of potential, not least in providing an instant, visual record of what pupils have done. Because it is online, parents can log in, see what their child has been working on, and add comments of their own. Some parents are already enthusiastic users of the system. Because teachers are highly skilled in assessing pupils' attainment, this information is secure and accurate. However, you have not yet collected enough information about how quickly pupils are moving through the 'I can' statements under this new system to be sure that it gives you information you need about progress over time.

- Your sixth form caters for a small number of students who, at the end of key stage 4, are not ready academically or socially and emotionally to move on to the challenges of college or work. Rightly, it focuses on building the skills and attributes that the pupils will need in order to be successful. There is a strong emphasis on self-help, life skills and independence. Students follow accredited courses and continue to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Work is adapted according to students' prior attainment. Work in their books shows that they build well on what they know already. However, the recorded assessments do not give a full picture of how well each student is progressing from their starting points.
- Sixth formers have the chance to try a number of activities such as bricklaying, car mechanics, painting and decorating, and hair and beauty, as well as working on the allotment. They are also given guidance on possible future careers. These activities give the students a good taste of the world of work. However, they are not fully personalised to the students' specific interests or aspirations.
- Sixth-form students are proud of their school, describing it as 'fantastic' and 'amazing'. They appreciate and thoroughly enjoy the range of activities that they experience in school and at alternative providers.
- You make sure that, across the school, pupils follow a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum. It includes the requirements of the national curriculum and is adjusted to meet the needs and interests of the pupils. There is rightly a strong emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics but also on teaching pupils the skills and attributes they will need to go on to become confident, independent learners, fully prepared for their next steps in education, work or training. Teachers also make sure that pupils enjoy their learning. During this inspection, for example, pupils in key stage 1 and 2 had great fun singing together. Not only did they enjoy the songs, they also practised new signs. Some were confident enough to stand in front and to lead the singing.
- Teachers provide effective support for pupils to help them develop their communication and language skills. Pupils are taught to use signs and symbols as aids to communication. Those who need it receive speech and language therapy. Pupils enjoy reading and listening to stories. When listening to a story at wet play time during this inspection, some pupils thought carefully about the storyline and made plausible predictions about what might happen next.
- You provide an extensive range of enrichment activities, clubs, residential experiences and visitors to school. Because many of your pupils have limited opportunities to socialise with others, you run a youth club. Lunchtime clubs

include music, singing, art, sporting activities, drama and computers. Your pupils also work towards the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. All of these opportunities make a strong contribution to the sense of community at Penn Fields and to pupils' well-being.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- once the new system for recording and tracking pupils' progress is well established, leaders evaluate its effectiveness in measuring progress over time and make adjustments if necessary
- leaders and teachers in the sixth form take steps to tailor vocational experiences more closely to the aspirations of individuals, and make sure that assessments of students' achievement fully reflect progress from their starting points.

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

Linda McGill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the start of the day, we toured the school, greeting members of staff. We then observed pupils as they arrived, and spoke to some parents. We discussed your self-evaluation and the key lines of enquiry for this inspection and agreed a plan for the rest of the day.

We spoke to several members of staff about aspects of the school's work, including the curriculum, assessment, safeguarding and provision in the sixth form. I met the chair and vice-chair of governors, the school's bursar and a representative of the local authority. We visited classrooms to observe the staff and pupils at work, attended an assembly and observed pupils at social times, including lunchtime. We met two groups of pupils, including a group of sixth formers.

We looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plan for improvement and the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. I examined other policies posted on the school's website. We looked at the 17 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including free-text comments. We also considered the views of 37 members of staff who completed the online questionnaire.