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Mr Billy McInally
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McInally

Short inspection of Stone Bay School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Mark Dale-Emberton, 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 June 2013.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide inspirational leadership and are determined to provide the best possible outcomes for pupils. Members of the wider leadership team share your vision of excellence. They are passionate about improving the school. The newly established governing body is confident that its partnership with you will enable the school to move forward at a rapid rate.

Pupils are extremely positive about the school. They say they are happy and the teachers are fun. Pupils join the school having often had previously negative experiences of education. Leaders collect detailed information about pupils before they start at the school, ensuring their successful transition. The staff take the time to make everything just right. They use their knowledge of the pupils to produce challenging individual programmes that allow the pupils to make progress. As a result, pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is good and there is a high level of pupil engagement and enjoyment. Parents spoke enthusiastically about the school to inspectors. One parent commented: 'The school is determined to try everything from a, b and c, and if that doesn't work, they don't give up, they try d, e and f.'

All staff are trained to support pupils using a positive behaviour approach. The school employs trained internal instructors who work with staff teams to provide consistency. This has been successful in dramatically decreasing incidents of poor behaviour.

Governors make a strong contribution to the school's improvement. Together with your governing body, you have developed an effective online communication system where all school information, including reports, action plans and assessment tracking, is easily accessible. Governors are confident that you have the drive to move the school forward.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school, including how pupils made consistently good or outstanding progress, sometimes from very low starting points. Inspectors also identified that activities were not always challenging enough and that teachers did not always modify activities in lessons, which impacted negatively on pupils' progress. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. Teachers now plan activities that consistently match the academic needs of pupils, enabling most pupils to make strong progress in their learning over time.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the process of self-evaluation. You were able to explain the school's many strengths as well as the priorities for improvement. You agreed with me that your new system to track pupils' progress needs further time to embed. We also agreed that leaders and governors need to track the impact of additional government funding more effectively to ensure that this funding is having the maximum impact and being used for the purpose it is intended.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. School leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and highly effective. The single central record is fully compliant. The school's recruitment procedures are secure. Staff training around safeguarding is thorough and includes regular updates. New staff follow a comprehensive induction programme which is effective in guaranteeing they know their role in safeguarding pupils and keeping them safe.

The school has excellent relationships with parents and outside agencies, working collectively with them to support pupils. All parents and staff who completed the Ofsted online surveys believe that the school keeps pupils safe. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. One pupil commented, 'It's the best school in the world.'

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have developed a robust system to track pupils' progress. They not only monitor academic progress, but also pupils' development in communication and independence, as well as their improvements in social interaction and behaviour. All the data is stored centrally and accessible to all staff. This is enabling leaders and staff to track progress and plan interventions increasingly effectively.

- The school has begun to analyse how improving pupils' engagement can reduce incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Measures introduced as a result are leading to stronger progress. All staff evaluate pupils' engagement in every lesson, and the resulting information is used to inform planning. Although this system has only recently been introduced, early indications are already showing positive results.
- Progress is good across the curriculum, including for those pupils eligible for pupil premium and catch-up funding. Leaders have rightly identified communication as a major barrier to progress and have used additional funding to employ a speech and language therapist. The speech and language therapist assesses all pupils and provides effective individual communication programmes. All staff are trained to deliver the communication programmes and, as a result, pupils' language skills are developing, enabling them to access the curriculum and increase their social interaction. Leaders and governors do not, as yet, monitor this work, or the additional support for Year 7 pupils, rigorously enough to enable them to have a clear understanding of its effectiveness.
- Strong teaching in the sixth form has ensured that pupils make progress in all three of the school's offered pathways. Leaders have devised a broad and balanced curriculum in key stage 5. This was designed to maximise the pupils' potential, both academically and also while developing their personal, social, communication and independence skills. As a result, pupils thrive. They are fully prepared for their next steps after leaving school and for life in the wider community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new systems to track wider outcomes are further developed, so that leaders and governors can analyse pupils' progress in all areas more efficiently, and that teachers can plan next steps in their personal development
- additional government funding is monitored more closely, so that they have a clearer understanding of its impact on pupils' progress.

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

Susan Conway
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and the school's leadership team, other members of staff and the joint chairs of the governing body. I also met with your local authority adviser. Inspectors visited a range of classes covering all year groups, observing pupils' learning, talking with them about their progress, and looking at their books. These observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team. We spoke to the school council as well as talking to parents on the telephone. We looked at all the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires, considering the views of four parents and 22 members of staff. We scrutinised a sample of pupils' work, and looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, the curriculum, and assessment. We examined the school's tracking of pupils' progress and attainment, and leaders' self-evaluation and plans for improvement.