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23 February 2018

Maria Smyth
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Dear Mrs Smyth

Short inspection of Vermont School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2018 with Hilary Goddard, 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.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your appointment in September 2014, you have led the school with determination and commitment, making the necessary changes to help pupils achieve as well as they can. Vermont School's values of 'belong, believe and achieve together' are evident throughout the school. You have a considerate understanding of pupils' varied and often complex needs. Many of your pupils have had a negative experience of schooling. However, you and your staff provide such a warm welcome that they quickly settle and start to thrive. This is at the heart of what makes your school such a positive place.

Staff are proud to work at this school. They show a detailed understanding of individual pupils' needs and tailor learning activities to build on pupils' starting points. Staff told inspectors that leaders support their professional development and that their ideas contribute to the school's development. Pupils value highly the support that they receive and recognise the progress that they have made since joining the school. One pupil commented that 'it's a great place to learn' and another said, 'I didn't fit in at my old school but here I've started catching up.'

Parents are delighted with the positive attitudes to learning that their children develop after joining the school. Parents also praised the way that staff help pupils to build stronger relationships with each other and with adults.

You have worked hard to address the areas identified for improvement at the

previous inspection. Ably supported by your new leadership team, you have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and pupils are now making much stronger progress from their starting points. There have also been significant changes to the governing body. New governors have brought more expertise, leading to sharper scrutiny of school leaders.

Behaviour around the school shows that pupils treat each other with respect. Pupils' good conduct is a reflection of the way that staff use skilfully a range of strategies to support them. Pupils learn how to think about the effect of their behaviour on their learning and what to do to be able to learn well. The palpable sense of belonging which permeates the school, and the improved behaviour, have helped to reduce the level of exclusions. While attendance has improved, it remains below the national average.

During the inspection we found pupils engaged in a range of appropriate activities and keen to tell us about the things they have learned. The curriculum motivates and interests pupils, and work is usually pitched at the right level to stretch and challenge them. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that they take a pride in their work and are, generally, making strong progress. Leaders have correctly identified that there are not always enough demands made on pupils to improve their writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure that children are safe. You have established a transparent and open culture. This means that whenever any member of staff has a concern, it is shared appropriately and acted upon. Pupils rightly report that they feel safe, and parents are happy with the school's actions to keep children safe.

Staff and governors take their responsibilities to look after children very seriously. They receive appropriate and timely training about what they need to know and do to follow the child protection policies of the school.

You continue to develop effective safeguarding practice in response to the experiences of children in your care. Everyone is vigilant in keeping children safe. You are persistent in working with other agencies to ensure that arrangements in place for children outside of school continue to ensure their safety.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we examined how well leaders have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and address areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. We particularly looked at the progress that pupils are making from their starting points and how the quality of teaching supports them to make good or better progress. We focused on how well pupils' behaviour is managed

and how well the school supports families of pupils who have too many days off school. In addition, we evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding.

- As a result of teachers' high expectations, most pupils are making good or better progress in all aspects of their learning. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher have developed an effective system for tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics. This enables leaders to identify when pupils are at risk of falling behind and to share this information with staff and governors. Leaders and governors now ensure that staff take appropriate action for pupils to catch up.
- Teachers plan carefully lessons to meet the needs of pupils. They question and prompt pupils well to keep them focused on their learning. Pupils say that they enjoy learning and want to come to school. When we visited lessons, we found pupils gaining in confidence and trying hard to succeed in the tasks they were given. However, at times teachers could challenge pupils to improve their writing further.
- Behaviour management is very effective. This is evident in lessons, in the way that staff handle incidents for individual pupils and in the attitudes that pupils show towards their work and the school as a whole. Pupils needing extra support benefit from effective interventions to help them understand how they are feeling and how to behave in school. All staff are clear about expectations for behaviour and encourage pupils to make the right choices to enable them to learn well.
- Attendance has improved, but is still below the national average. There is insufficient understanding of the reasons for absence and this hampers action to improve individual pupils' attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance continues to improve
- teaching provides greater challenge for pupils to improve their writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Johns
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, a middle leader, four governors, three parents and a group of five pupils. I also met with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors visited

nine lessons, accompanied by a member of the leadership team. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including in lessons, during lunchtime and in the playground. Inspectors considered the responses of three parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as two emails. We also received 22 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluations of their data, the school's improvement plan, minutes of the local governing body, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding documentation. Inspectors also scrutinised some of the pupils' work.