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Mr Tom England
Senior Head of Centre
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Dear Mr England

Short inspection of Amber Valley & Erewash Support Centre

Following my visit to the school on 13 February 2018 with Deirdre Duignan, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Heather Hawkes, 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 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The senior head of centre has successfully shared the school's vision with the four separate teams he leads. The staff are highly committed to their roles and provide support, challenge and encouragement to the pupils. They develop good relationships with the pupils to help them make progress in their learning. Staff morale is good.

However, the leaders' school improvement plan does not give a clear direction of how the school intends to improve, and it is not understood by all staff. Furthermore, the management committee has not held the senior head of centre to account well enough for the progress that pupils make. These relative shortcomings in leadership mean that not all pupils make consistently good progress and school leaders are not held fully to account for their actions.

Pupils speak highly about the members of staff. They say the staff treat them with respect and readily help them if they require it. The vast majority of pupils, who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream schools, told the inspectors that they prefer the education offered at the support centres. Parents and carers are very complimentary about the school. One parent said, 'It is the best place in

the world for my son to go to.' The ethos within each centre is positive with bright displays valuing pupils' work, particularly in art.

The alternative provision team is well led. Each pupil has a key worker and pupils' interests are taken into account when choosing the most suitable alternative provider. Pupils have the opportunities to study a wide variety of courses. These include motor vehicles, hair and beauty, outdoor adventure activities, music and creative arts, to name but a few. They make good progress working towards their vocational qualifications. However, not all pupils are sure about which qualification they are working towards.

The alternative provision team have asked providers to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development alongside studying for their vocational qualifications. Pupils studying the motor vehicle course have discussed the exploitative nature of pornography. In addition, pupils engaged very well in a lesson which focused on the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The pupils were highly articulate and showed a good understanding of the issues raised.

Pupils in each centre have the opportunities to go on visits to further develop their knowledge of different subjects and of the wider geographical area. Visits have included a geography trip to the Lace Market in Nottingham, visiting an art gallery for GCSE art and adventure activities on the River Derwent. Pupils attain particularly well in art with five pupils achieving a good GCSE pass last year, and one pupil achieving a grade A.

At the time of the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to improve the quality of teaching to ensure that teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers at all three centres pitch the work appropriately to meet the needs of most of the pupils. Pupils present their work to a good standard and most make appropriate progress from their starting points. Some pupils do not make good progress in their reading. Leaders recognise the tests used to assess what the pupils can do on entry to the centres are not robust enough to set accurate progress targets. Leaders have not reported to the management committee on the progress pupils make, only pupils' attainment. Consequently, the management committee do not have enough information to challenge leaders on the impact of teaching at the centres.

Also at the time of the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to develop leadership at all three sites to improve the quality of teaching, increase the breadth of subjects taught and to use the analysis of behaviour to further improve pupils' behaviour. You work closely with the other centre leaders and regularly carry out joint lesson observations and work analysis to check the quality of teaching. Teaching is consistently good. Pupils have the opportunity to study a range of subjects through topics in key stage 2, and study biology, geography, personal and social education and art at key stage 4.

Although you analyse behaviour annually, you do not analyse closely enough

patterns of behaviour through the year. Furthermore, the information you provide to the management committee about exclusions does not contain enough detail to enable the management committee to challenge you on the information. The number of fixed-term exclusions continues to fluctuate too much at individual settings.

Safeguarding is effective.

Each pupil has a key worker who works closely with the pupils, their families and external agencies to ensure that the pupils are safe and making progress in school. If a concern is raised about a pupil, prompt action is taken by staff to inform the relevant people. These actions are recorded. Key workers attend multi-agency meetings and are well informed about the pupils' needs. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils' attendance is closely tracked. Alternative providers follow the school's attendance and absconding procedures. There are also consistent systems in place if pupils do not attend any of the school sites. Latest attendance figures for this year show attendance is rising.

Staff are aware of local issues that could affect pupils' safety. These include gang culture, substance abuse and sexual exploitation online. The school has a personal and social education scheme to inform pupils of the dangers. However, if pupils do not attend the day the programme is taught, they may miss these valuable life skills lessons. In addition, although alternative providers also teach pupils to stay safe, including online safety, leaders do not know if all pupils at the provisions are taught these life skills.

Incidents of physical restraint are rare. However, leaders have recognised that not enough staff have had appropriate training in how to restrain pupils. Leaders have booked training to take place for staff in March 2018.

Inspection findings

- The key lines of enquiry for this inspection focused on leaders' actions to improve teaching and raise pupils' outcomes, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders do not have a coherent school development plan to further improve teaching and raise pupils' attainment, so more pupils attain a strong pass in English and mathematics at GCSE. Furthermore, the management committee have not been well informed about the progress pupils make. As a result, the level of challenge and support they have provided the centre leaders has been weak.
- The management committee have recognised their weaknesses and have recently recruited two experienced local headteachers. This has increased the leadership capacity of the committee. They have recently started to ask questions that are more searching about pupils' progress and behaviour. However, centre leaders do not yet provide the committee with enough information to enable

members to challenge and support effectively.

- Teachers plan work to match pupils' abilities in most subjects and most pupils achieve well, particularly in writing, mathematics and art. Pupils have good opportunities to use quality texts, such as 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time', to inspire them to write. In mathematics, pupils are challenged to find areas of rectangles and triangles. The proportion of pupils who attend alternative provision, and who gain functional skills in English and mathematics, is extremely high.
- However, pupils, who struggle with reading, do not receive enough support to help them accelerate their progress, particularly in key stages 2 and 4. In addition, pupils who attend alternative provision do not have regular opportunities to read at length to further develop their comprehension skills.
- The centres use rewards and sanctions as part of their behaviour policy. The policy is implemented consistently. If sanctions are used, staff explain clearly to the pupils why they have been issued and explain to pupils how they can improve their behaviour. The high level of respect between staff and pupils, both at centres and at alternative provision, means that behaviour is typically good. However, you do not take action quickly enough when behaviour deteriorates for some pupils. As a result, fixed-term exclusions can rise quickly and be sustained for too long.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school improvement plan contains actions to improve pupils' progress and clear success criteria by which those actions can be judged
- the management committee increases the level of challenge and support for centre leaders to ensure that all pupils are making good progress and the number of fixed-term exclusions reduce
- all pupils receive personal and social education to enable them to have appropriate life skills to function effectively in society
- pupils' reading ability improves, particularly for those pupils who find reading more difficult, and to closely track their progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector
Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the heads of centres and the head of provision. We also met with teachers, teaching assistants and spoke with pupils. We observed learning at the alternative provision and at each centre with leaders. We reviewed pupils' work. We met with the chair of the management committee and one other member of the committee. Inspectors reviewed records about keeping children safe, their attendance and behaviour. We studied your school development plan and the school's self-evaluation. We spoke with four parents on the telephone and considered three texts from the Ofsted free-text service. We reviewed the seven responses to the staff survey.