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Ms Leanne Forde-Nassey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Forde-Nassey

Short inspection of The Key Education Centre

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018 with Jo McSherrie, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have provided determined and compassionate leadership following a period of turbulence after the previous headteacher left the school. Since your appointment in September 2017, you have established higher expectations of pupils' behaviour and what pupils can achieve. Parents, carers, pupils and staff all remark on the improvements. Teachers' morale is high, and a group of teachers said, 'the headteacher's enthusiasm is infectious, we feel invigorated and we are now together as a team'.

The vast majority of pupils have a fragmented educational experience in their recent past. Staff strive to understand pupils' complex behavioural and learning needs. Staff are determined to ensure that pupils are supported well so that they can make good progress. Regular meetings between staff enable information about pupils to be shared effectively. Due to a high degree of pooled and up-to-date knowledge, pupils receive highly consistent support at the centre. Pupils re-engage quickly with education on arrival at the school.

Leaders are refreshingly honest, and rigorously seek out areas that need improvement. Most issues identified from the last inspection as needing improvement have been tackled well, such as strengthening the monitoring of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and there is much capacity to improve the school further.

Liaison with local schools and other alternative learning provision is developed effectively. Your vision to ensure that all schools work in a similar way to support pupils at risk of exclusion is being developed well. School staff work collaboratively with professionals in other schools so that transition arrangements are effective. A local headteacher said, 'there is now a real and growing commitment to working in partnership to support pupils in the locality.'

Parents are supportive of the school, with the majority recommending it to others. One parent said, 'the staff are amazing, they have done everything to support my son and myself'. The school's own surveys show that parental satisfaction has improved rapidly in recent times.

Pupils say the school curriculum helps them develop their skills. One pupil said the school 'brings everyone out of their bubble'. Pupils are keen to share their success with others, many of them having experienced failure in their educational past. Pupils are proud to belong to the school. They wear the new school uniform neatly and take care with the school surroundings. However, pupils' absence from school is a considerable barrier to further progress.

The management committee is experienced and skilled. It has high ambition for the school, saying that, 'we want it to be a centre of excellence to serve our community of local schools'. Management committee members visit the school regularly to support leaders and carry out safeguarding or other audit activities. They ensure that the headteacher provides them with exactly the information they need to challenge school leaders to improve further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding that permeates the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Checks on adults' suitability to work with pupils are rigorous and documented well.

The school's records show that all concerns about pupils are rigorously followed up. Regular meetings take place between key personnel in school and outside agencies to ensure that pupils who are at risk are supported well. Staff have regular training so that they are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe from risks such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation.

Pupils' safety and well-being is a key priority for the school. Pupils say they feel safe at the school and that they are looked after well. One pupil said, 'we are like a massive family'. Pupils say that while there is a small amount of bullying behaviour between pupils, it is dealt with sensitively and swiftly by staff.

Inspection findings

- The focus of this inspection was to investigate specific areas of the school's provision, including the effectiveness of the curriculum, the progress of most-able pupils, and the leadership of pupils' attendance.
- The curriculum is broad and meets pupils' needs well. The core curriculum, including, among other subjects, English, mathematics and science, leads to qualifications appropriate to the pupils' abilities, including GCSE. Leaders' analysis of key stage 4 pupils' achievements shows they make good gains. Leaders have developed alternative learning experiences to extend the curriculum, such as bike-repair courses, and sessions focusing on building pupils' emotional and social skills. Key stages 3 and 4 pupils' good progress in alternative learning areas such as food hygiene is rewarded with external accreditation.
- Pupils make rapid progress with their emotional and behavioural skills that enable some pupils, but not all, to return to mainstream education. Key stage 4 pupils are prepared well for their next stage of education, and leaders say that all pupils continue on to education and employment.
- Pupils report that they have gaps in their knowledge due to difficulties in learning at previous educational placements. Teachers identify such gaps through assessments and plan appropriate work activities to enable pupils to learn effectively.
- Pupils' progress is strong in the core subjects of English and mathematics. Teacher feedback in these subjects, both verbal and written, precisely identifies next steps in learning. Pupils respond positively to teachers' advice in these subjects.
- In English, teaching provides pupils with targeted support to improve their literacy skills. Most-able pupils catch up quickly and write with accuracy. However, writing across the curriculum is less well developed. Leaders and teachers acknowledge that promotion of pupils' literacy skills is inconsistent across subjects. There is not enough opportunity for most-able pupils to write at length with accuracy.
- Most-able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. This is because most-able pupils are not consistently challenged across the curriculum. In particular, in science they are not prompted to develop deeper thinking about scientific issues. Subject-specific spelling mistakes are not corrected consistently. Expectations are not high enough for most-able pupils in all subjects.
- Leaders identify that attendance is a key priority for the school to improve. Pupils' progress is hampered by low attendance. Analysis of attendance has not been sharp enough in the past. Leaders have now developed a more precise tracking system so that success of any actions can be tracked. There are early signs of improvement but it is too soon to see whether gains are sustained. Too many pupils still do not attend often enough.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve pupils' attendance
- they spread the good teaching, learning and assessment practice in English and mathematics to all other subjects
- pupils, including the most able, have opportunities to write at greater depth across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Child
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher and senior staff, a group of staff, and four members of the management committee, including the chairperson. They observed learning in nine classes, all jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. The lead inspector observed off-site learning at Motiv8, an alternative learning provider. They scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and a sample of most-able pupils' books from key stages 3 and 4.

Inspectors took account of 13 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire and spoke to a parent on the telephone. Inspectors spoke to a local headteacher and a member of the local authority who supports the school. Inspectors took account of six responses from the staff questionnaire. They met with two groups of pupils.

Inspectors analysed a range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation, information about pupils' achievement, safeguarding checks, case studies of pupils, policies, and minutes from management committee meetings.