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Mr Daryl Charles  
Headteacher  
The Sutton School and Specialist College  
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Dear Mr Charles

### **Short inspection of The Sutton School and Specialist College**

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2018 with Johanne Clifton HMI, 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 Sutton School and Specialist College was judged to be good in September 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, together with other leaders and governors, have ensured that the strengths of the school have been sustained and built upon. Although the leadership team is new, you have driven forward school improvement by working closely with its members. Together, you have examined ways to improve the curriculum and assessment to ensure that they meet the needs of all pupils and enable them to reach their full potential.

Since your appointment, you have enthusiastically begun to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. You have introduced an enriched curriculum that focuses on academic, personal and social development. It enables pupils to gain much-needed life skills and make good progress. The impact of the enrichment activities that The Sutton School and Specialist College offer demonstrates the good level of progress that pupils are making in their studies and personal achievements.

The dedicated leadership team is motivated both by yourself and the willingness of the pupils. Your staff demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of building relationships with pupils. The positive relationships that have been developed enhance the pupils' ability to be respectful towards everyone that they meet and tolerant of each other. Through the robust and enriched continuing development programme, staff have ample opportunities to develop their

knowledge and understanding of the various needs and abilities of the pupils. They use this knowledge well to provide stimulating lessons and set appropriate tasks for the pupils. Faculty leaders are key in ensuring that their curriculum areas are suitable for the diverse, changing and increasing pupil population.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A strong safeguarding culture is evident at The Sutton School and Specialist College. You and the leadership team have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and take account of the needs of the pupils in the school. Protecting pupils and keeping them safe is a key priority for everyone.

Pupils' medical needs are well supported and the necessary checks are in place. Appropriate procedures ensure that staff register all of their concerns and senior leaders follow these up immediately. Clear protocols are in place for dealing with absences and pupils missing from school. When there have been safeguarding incidents, school leaders have followed the school's own, and the local authority's, procedures to the letter.

Safeguarding training is regularly provided for all staff so that they know what to do and who to contact when they have any concerns. Throughout the school, pupils are taught about the potential risks and dangers they might face as they grow up. As a result, pupils are more aware of how to keep safe, including when they are online. Pupils said that they feel safe and well looked after at school.

The promotion of pupils' self-regulation of their own behaviour is a clear strength. Leaders have recently introduced support systems to improve pupils' mental health and well-being, including working with child and adolescent mental health services. As this is still a new procedure, not all staff are consistently applying the necessary strategies and, on rare occasions for a small group of pupils, staff need to use physical interventions to assist pupils in managing their behaviours. Logs of behaviour incidents and analysis of behaviours show that these interventions are having a positive impact on reducing the frequency of these incidents.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have ensured that a broad range of GCSE and vocational subjects, appropriate to the varying abilities of the pupils, are offered. The most able pupils access GCSE mathematics and English at a local high school. School data shows that all pupils entered for GCSE, functional skills and vocational subject assessments gained graded outcomes.
- Leaders are passionate and ambitious in ensuring that pupils are well cared for and well educated. Faculty leaders have introduced new schemes of work, and rigorous staff training ensures that staff have the skills to meet the changing needs of pupils.
- Teachers provide appropriate challenge, such as using deeper questioning in science and mathematics, and valuable feedback during lessons. This ensures that pupils are able to reach their full potential academically and in the development of

their independence and life skills. However, written feedback to pupils does not always provide clear enough guidelines about how to improve their learning.

- The curriculum offered provides an equal balance of academic, enrichment and social skills. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Where progress is not as strong, leaders have implemented a range of intervention strategies to ensure that gaps in learning are quickly identified and addressed. A great deal of thought has been given to the life skills study programme. For example, pupils are taught how to wash clothes, cook simple meals and care for young children and animals.
- Vocational programmes offer pupils the opportunities to learn motor vehicle, hair and beauty, and construction skills. Pupils are able to utilise the skills they learn on these programmes, for example by painting classrooms and creating hairstyles for school performances.
- Leaders work hard to improve attendance, and effective strategies are reducing persistent absence. The pastoral leader provides a range of support and intervention strategies, which include workshops for parents and carers and home visits.
- New pupils settle in remarkably well and staff quickly build up relationships, which reduces pupils' anxieties. Staff are positive, welcoming, proactive and understand the importance of getting to know pupils' needs and abilities quickly and effectively. However, some younger pupils who have transferred from some settings did not have adequate transition support.
- You have recently introduced a new assessment system for recording and tracking pupils' progress. This system breaks down the curriculum into smaller steps and enables the tracking of the life skills programme that promotes independence and social skills for all pupils. The faculty leaders are enthusiastic to ensure that the system becomes deeply embedded into their curriculum areas.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- behaviour strategies are applied consistently by all staff to ensure a beneficial impact on the behaviour of all pupils
- transition processes are improved so that all feeder schools provide the necessary support and information to pupils and their families.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Ellis  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and senior leaders to discuss progress since the last inspection, the school's self-evaluation and the key lines of enquiry for this inspection. We agreed a plan for the day.

My colleague and I spoke to several members of staff about the curriculum, assessment, behaviour, and welfare and attendance. I spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the designated lead for safeguarding. We visited classrooms to observe pupils and staff at work, met with pupils and observed behaviour at lunchtime.

We looked at samples of pupils' work from both key stages. We reviewed many documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, local authority's recorded visits, minutes from governing body meetings, the single central record for safeguarding, and staff files. We looked at the 12 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and considered the views of the 21 staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire.