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Mrs Abi Martin
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Dear Mrs Martin

Short inspection of Southall School

Following my visit to the school on 2 October 2018 with Andrea Quigley, 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 February 2014.

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.**

There was a period of instability in the leadership of the school following the previous inspection. You became headteacher in September 2016 after a year in which there was no headteacher. You quickly identified the school's strengths and areas for development. You can articulate clearly what the school does well and what must be improved. Together with the governing body, you have created capacity to make further improvements by appointing a skilled senior leadership team. However, many of the actions you have taken have yet to have the necessary impact on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

You and the governing body have welcomed the support and challenge from the local authority. Advisers have provided helpful advice in compiling the school development plan and monitoring its implementation. However, the school improvement plan is part of a five-year strategy and does not focus sharply enough on the most important current priorities, for example, reducing persistent absence or raising the level of challenge for pupils. Additionally, while leaders visit classrooms regularly and check the work in pupils' books, they do not check the impact of support provided in securing consistently effective teaching. Consequently, teaching is variable, and pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

The learning environment meets pupils' varied special educational needs (SEN) well. For example, you have created a dedicated space for pupils who have complex SEN. This includes a well-resourced quiet room and separate sensory area. Staff use this space effectively to deliver an appropriate curriculum to small groups of pupils.

Relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Teachers provide effective support, so that pupils behave well and learn successfully. Pupils learn strategies to manage their own behaviour. They value the school's reward system and work hard to achieve points and certificates. This promotes positive behaviour. As a result, the number of unacceptable behaviour incidents is reducing. The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced significantly over the past year. However, despite these positives, leaders do not review behaviour support plans and risk assessments regularly enough. As a result, leaders cannot be certain that plans match pupils' current needs.

You have begun to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Through training, all staff are developing their confidence and skills to support pupils to improve their reading and writing effectively. Dedicated tutor time provides pupils with regular opportunities to read and to practise specific writing skills. Actions taken to improve homework and parental engagement in supporting pupils with homework have been effective. As a result, the majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that their child receives appropriate homework.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The person responsible for safeguarding keeps herself up to date by attending regular child protection and 'Prevent' duty training, which she shares with the staff.

Staff who spoke to inspectors are confident about how to report safeguarding concerns. They understand their responsibilities in keeping children safe and secure. Staff understand and follow school procedures to ensure that pupils are safe.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that there are several staff they can speak to if they are worried or have a concern. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I wanted to make sure that pupils are being challenged so that they make good progress. Leaders have recently introduced a new assessment system to check pupils' progress towards their personalised curriculum targets and to monitor the short-term outcomes from education, health and care (EHC) plans. Leaders expect teachers to use this assessment information to inform their planning. However, from discussions with leaders, observations in classes and pupils' books, it is clear that not all teachers use

assessment information consistently to plan sufficiently challenging learning that matches pupils' specific needs closely. Consequently, too few pupils across the school make the progress of which they are capable.

- The school has developed an online incident reporting system to record pupils' negative behaviours. The well-being team and senior leaders review these incident records. The school has invested in external scrutiny of incident records. However, leaders do not systematically review pupils' behaviour support plans and risk assessments and adjust or update them accordingly. They do not identify the next steps for pupils. Consequently, they do not meet pupils' needs fully.
- Several new governors have joined the governing body over the last 12 months. Governors understand the challenges the headteacher faces and focus on supporting her to continue to improve the school. They work closely with leaders to assure themselves that improvements are being made. For example, governors attend meetings where leaders monitor and review books and take part in learning walks around the school with leaders. However, these monitoring activities are not sufficiently linked to the impact on teaching or pupils' progress.
- Leaders promote the importance of pupils attending school regularly and support families and those pupils who have a genuine reason for not attending school. However, the number of pupils who are frequently absent from school remains too high. This is not reflected as an action in the school improvement plan for this year.
- Leaders consulted pupils in key stage 3 when they were planning the new thematic curriculum. With pupils' help, themes such as 'Darwin and discovery' successfully link learning across different subjects. As a result, pupils are interested and motivated to learn.
- Key stage 4 pupils study a range of suitable accredited courses. They have an opportunity to attend vocational studies at college and enjoy a variety of work experiences both inside and outside school. As a result of an effective key stage 4 curriculum, pupils make informed choices about the next steps in their education.
- Your bright and welcoming school celebrates pupils' work. The outside spaces have been developed well to include a football pitch, seating areas, garden spaces, table-tennis tables and an open field. Pupils value the lunchtime clubs. For example, the girls' football club is well attended. The pupils run their own radio station, which is transmitted to the playgrounds at lunchtime.
- The pupil parliament is a very active part of the school, where pupils' views are collected and heard. Members are voted as ministers and each minister has a responsibility. These include a minister of technology, a minister of sport and a minister of finance. Ministers take their responsibility seriously. For example, one pupil wrote to the local authority and 'demanded' a meeting to discuss post-16 provision. Such work enables pupils to gain a good understanding of democracy and civil duties and responsibilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use assessment information to plan work that is sufficiently challenging for all pupils and enables them to make the progress of which they are capable
- pupils' behaviour plans and risk assessments are regularly reviewed
- leaders' plans identify clear priorities for improvement, and that leaders and governors regularly check the impact of their actions on improving teaching and pupils' progress
- leaders continue to work closely with pupils and parents and carers to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Clugston
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, leaders and members of the governing body. I spoke with representatives of the local authority. I visited classes with senior leaders to observe pupils' learning in lessons and to look at pupils' work.

Inspectors met with parents at the beginning and end of the school day. I took account of the 43 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the seven free-text comments. I also took account of the 22 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons and around school. I also took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.

Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, assessment and progress information, and documents relating to safeguarding.