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Miss Leanne Camaish
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Dear Miss Camaish

Short inspection of Rotherham Aspire

Following my visit to the school on 20 November 2018 with Berni Moorcroft, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as headteacher, you have improved the school with purpose and passion. You focus on the needs of the pupils and of the school, and your ethos and values are shared with staff and pupils. You have put improvement measures into place, particularly in the areas of accreditation, curriculum and pupils' well-being. These measures are having a positive impact on improving pupils' outcomes.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They talk about the positive changes that you have brought about, particularly in relation to middle leadership. Staff feel appreciated. They acknowledge how the changes you have implemented, along with a comprehensive training package, have had a positive effect on their workload and well-being.

The school currently has pupils in key stages 1 to 4. Pupils receive excellent support and a bespoke timetable within a broad and balanced curriculum. For example, they take part in both academic and vocational subjects which meet their interests and supports their transition to further education.

Attendance is improving, and is improving rapidly for some pupils. Pupils enjoy

attending school and appreciate the support that they are given. This is seen in their words and actions. For example, they enjoy showing visitors their work and are happy to talk about their journey and future plans. Parents and carers are positive about how their child's attitude has improved since joining the school, with one carer stating that Aspire was her child's 'rock, her safe place'.

Pupils' behaviour throughout the school is good. Staff have clear expectations of pupils' behaviour across all key stages. Pupils are supported and challenged to learn and develop tools to modify their behaviour, such as moving themselves away from difficult situations, using calm spaces and learning to show respect. Teachers use positive praise and rewards successfully in order to encourage this development. Incidents of difficult and challenging behaviour are decreasing because the environment and structures closely meet the needs of the pupils. When disruption does occur, staff deal with it in a calm manner and defuse it quickly so that pupils' learning continues.

The curriculum has a strong focus on personalisation. Teachers plan activities which support pupils' individual well-being and behaviour needs in order to ensure that they are ready for learning. You ensure that classrooms are calm environments, which allow pupils to settle quickly and teachers to establish positive routines for learning.

Since the previous inspection, new systems for monitoring pupils' progress have been implemented. These more robust systems are starting to show an accurate picture of each pupil's skills and knowledge when they join the school. This, in turn, ensures that leaders have a more accurate picture of pupils' progress over time. Leaders acknowledge that this system is not yet fully embedded and is something we agreed needs to continue to develop.

Pupils' transition into further education, training or employment is a strength of the school. The partnership working and the curriculum that are in place ensure that pupils are well prepared for their future lives.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, training is undertaken by all staff and records are of a high quality. Your team of designated safeguarding leaders work effectively across all sites to support and manage pupils who have complex issues, and they report to the local authority when necessary.

Safeguarding practice across the school is strong. Members of staff have a good awareness of its importance, and they demonstrate a secure understanding of their responsibilities. The designated safeguarding team have a clear and strong knowledge of the issues facing pupils in the wider community. Training is rapidly put in place to ensure that the wider staff team have an awareness and understanding of key issues such as child sexual exploitation.

Pupils have many opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe. Through the

use of topic-based work, displays, focused teaching and one-to-one support, pupils learn about physical and mental health and online safety.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we focused on teaching and learning and how this improves the achievement of pupils. Leaders' assessment of teaching is accurate. Support is appropriately provided to develop teaching and learning. Pupils, particularly those in the primary phase, have one-to-one reading and phonics support to address any gaps in their knowledge and skills. This enables pupils to rapidly improve so that transition back to mainstream school is a strong possibility.
- Leaders have recently made changes to the ways in which they collect and record information from assessing pupils' skills and abilities so that they can check pupils' rates of progress over time with greater accuracy. Leaders are now starting to use the information they have already collected to influence their plans for further school improvement. However, we agreed that further work is needed to ensure that this information is robust and accurate and, therefore, a fully reliable indicator of just how much progress pupils are making, and is more precise about what needs to be improved.
- Discussions with pupils during the inspection indicate that they clearly understand the tasks given to them in class and what they need to do in order to be successful. Teachers are aspirational for their pupils and set targets that challenge them. Pupils at Hutton Park have a strong working knowledge of their vocational curriculum. They can explain how this supports their future education and employment plans.
- Highly effective questioning is evident throughout the school. This supports the recall of prior knowledge and allows teachers to build on and progress pupils' learning. Teaching assistants work effectively throughout the school, offering both additional support for individual pupils and small-group work. They are well-trained, confident and competent to deal with the personalised timetables that support each pupil.
- A further focus of our visit was attendance and behaviour. Attendance across both full- and part-time placements is improving. Leaders have introduced robust procedures for tracking and monitoring attendance, which ensures the well-being of pupils. Their work with families to improve the attendance of those pupils who have not been at school for long periods of time before their referral to Aspire is paying off. In some cases, pupils' rates of attendance improve considerably from those at mainstream school. However, leaders acknowledge that further improving attendance of all pupils is still an important area of development. This is particularly the case for those pupils who have been out of education for a period of time before joining Aspire.
- Behaviour across the school is consistently well managed. The introduction of the care team has allowed staff to build positive relationships with pupils, which supports the clear and high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils respond well to these expectations and are proud of their school, their work and their

achievements.

- Positive reinforcement, therapeutic language and de-escalation techniques used by staff across the school support pupils to manage their own behaviour. The seamless relationship between teaching staff and the care team ensures that learning is not disrupted.
- The school curriculum is well-thought-out and meets the social, emotional and behavioural needs of the pupils. Art remains a strength of the school, and pupils respond well to the challenges set in this subject. English and mathematics are taught well throughout the school. Leaders are now working to improve pupils' achievement even further by providing more opportunities for pupils to write in the primary phase.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance continues to improve, particularly for pupils who have been out of education for a period of time before joining Aspire
- systems to check pupils' rates of progress over time are further developed so that the information gathered is fully accurate and can be used more effectively to shape school improvement planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Tricia Stevens
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher and members of the middle leadership team. Meetings were also held with a member of the management committee and a small number of parents. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from ACE, an alternative provider used by the school. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan, pupils' progress information, attendance information, behaviour analysis, questionnaires from staff and the single central record. Inspectors made visits to all sites to review pupils' learning and spoke to pupils during the school day.