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28 February 2019

Mr T Skazick
Head of School
First Base
34 Ashley Downs
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Dear Mr Skazick

Short inspection of First Base

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019 with Jason Howard, Her Majesty's 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education at the school since the last inspection. You, the executive headteacher, members of your management committee and your staff demonstrate a clear vision for the future of the school and for the outreach support it provides.

First Base is a beautiful and well-organised learning environment, which effectively provides for some of the most vulnerable and challenging pupils. Leaders and staff have a clear and shared expectation that every pupil will receive the best provision, matched to their varying individual needs. All are determined to create an outstanding learning environment. Senior leaders have established a culture among all staff of high-quality teaching and learning and pupils rightly expect this. This includes very effective social skills teaching during which staff work in a targeted way with pupils who may have struggled with difficult life events. This enables pupils to re-engage with learning and is an essential part of all that staff do to ensure success for their pupils.

Pupils join the school at different times of the school year. You have implemented a flexible and successful approach to meeting the needs of pupils who have not experienced success in mainstream placements, some of whom have been out of education for a while. Pupils access a place at First Base through the Suffolk 'in-year fair access panel'. Some pupils have historical poor attendance at their mainstream school due to part-time timetables or placement breakdown and some have been out of education prior to joining you at First Base. All pupils benefit from a planned transition from or back into school and through the individualised plans your staff implement for them are successful in their placements. This positive, well-considered approach means that pupils are keen to come to school as often as they can, and their attendance is good.

In the previous inspection report, inspectors highlighted two areas for improvement. Leaders have taken successful action to tackle these areas, as detailed below.

Supported by leaders, staff have developed a range of well-resourced approaches to supporting pupils to learn well. For example, as pupils arrive at school, individualised tasks are set out to engage them in the day and ensure a calm start. These activities are at a level appropriate to pupils' individual attainment, likes, and interests. As a result, Pupils are quickly engrossed in the start of the day and waste no time.

Literacy development is promoted well. Pupils enjoy their phonics session and are keen to sound out words and to share their successes and interest in reading; these skills are encouraged in all aspects of their learning. Improved, more-detailed progress measures in English mean that staff are better informed about the next steps to take to support pupils and members of the management committee have an improved understanding of the impact of this work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders manage safeguarding arrangements well. It is evident that the safeguarding of pupils is important to all staff. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records, including those relevant to child protection, are detailed and of good quality. Leaders ensure that the appropriate checks are made when they employ new staff. Safeguarding procedures are known and followed by staff who appropriately record and report any concerns they have. Risk assessments implemented to protect pupils are good because the specific needs of pupils are carefully considered. As a result, pupils are increasingly aware of the actions they can take to keep themselves safe.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe and to manage their time on social media and in online gaming with care. Pupils are supported to become more resilient and respond well, even with people they do not know. Staff have also taught parents about managing safety online for their children. Leaders have a good understanding of contextual safeguarding issues including the risks involved in 'County Lines'. Through engagement with wider agencies, they take account of the most recent local knowledge in their work.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and members of the management committee routinely monitor the quality of some important areas of the school's work. This gives them an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. As a result, they are assured that the quality of learning experiences helps pupils to progress well towards achieving their potential. However, this monitoring is not used sufficiently to inform the continuing improvement of the holistic curriculum they so clearly value.
- The recording leaders use to monitor pupils' behaviour shows that they, together with staff, have a good understanding of the number of incidents of complex and challenging behaviour. However, analysis does not identify escalating patterns of behaviour rapidly enough so that staff can take actions to de-escalate them.

- Staff are clear in their expectations and are excellent managers of the learning environment, quickly redirecting or refocusing pupils to sustain their engagement. This effective support from the positive role models provided by staff means that the social and emotional needs of pupils are consistently met. As a result, pupils positively and successfully engage in learning.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent. Pupils value the staff who help them, they respect their opinions and listen to what they have to say. This helps pupils to gain in confidence and begin to believe in their own abilities. These positive relationships are key to the success of the provision.
- Well-planned, consistent, high-quality teaching and lots of praise help pupils to begin to manage their own behaviours. As a result, pupils waste little time and the behaviour of any one pupil rarely detracts from the learning of others. Pupils understand the reward system and are visibly excited to see the tokens they are awarded. Motivation is even better when pupils can choose from the treasure box. In using these strategies, the head of school provides positive feedback and endorsement of pupils' behaviour and engagement.
- Staff establish very positive relationships with families. Effective aspects of practice include the 'thrive and play' sessions which support parents to develop their skills of engaging their children in play. Leaders have not yet, however, developed a culture of coproduction where parents are fully involved in designing provision for their children from the start. Too often, parents are given information after provision for their child has been designed so are not fully included in the development of activities to best meet their children's needs.
- Staff are skilled at accurately assessing pupils' achievement and their barriers to success when they arrive at school. This information provides an informed baseline measure which is used to develop the individualised work programme designed to re-engage each pupil. This child-centred approach ensures that pupils' progress is as strong as it can be.
- Well-rehearsed and established routines ensure that the atmosphere in class is calm and purposeful. Highly skilled staff are creative and innovative in their practice and pupils are thoughtfully supported. Because provision is carefully organised, pupils do not unduly worry about what might go wrong. Consequently, pupils extend the boundaries of their learning and try new experiences without fear of failure.
- Pupils support one another to try new skills. Inspectors observed young people challenge themselves to think positively and take risks in a safe environment, for example when trying to learn to ride a bike.
- Most pupils transition back to mainstream school after two or three terms at First Base. These transitions are very well-managed to ensure the success of pupils. As a result of effective outreach work and the well-planned one-to-one support provided, reintegration is successful for the vast majority of pupils.
- Positive working relationship with the local authority has enabled school leaders to make very good use of the effective support offered by the local authority advisers and school improvement team.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Parents can contribute fully to the development of approaches to support their children to become successful and learn well.
- Systems for tracking pupils' progress are further developed to ensure that all aspects of pupils' learning, personal development and behaviour incidents are recorded, analysed and used to inform developing best practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, the head of school, teaching staff, support staff, pupils, a member of the management committee and a representative from the local authority. We spoke to you about your self-evaluation and the school's development plan and together we carried out a series of learning walks where we visited lessons. A range of the school's own analyses and planning was considered, pupils' progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records were scrutinised. Inspectors joined pupils in class, during break and at lunchtime.