

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



1 March 2019

Miss Emma Pearce
Headteacher
The Pines Special School
Marsh Hill
Birmingham
West Midlands
B23 7EY

Dear Miss Pearce

Short inspection of The Pines Special School

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 2019 with Sarah Ashley, 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 outstanding in January 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 outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in the school. There has been an extensive building project to enable the school to add key stage 3 pupils. There have also been significant changes to the senior leadership team. In 2016, you were appointed as headteacher and subsequently you were joined by a new deputy and assistant headteacher.

Since your appointment as headteacher, you have taken action to address areas of weakness within teaching and learning. You have brought rigor to the leadership of the school. Most staff and parents are positive about these changes.

Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors said that their children feel safe at the school and that staff are supportive of both them and their children. The parent survey contains many positive comments from parents. For example, one parent commented that their child is: 'coming on leaps and bounds thanks to the hard work of the staff' and another said: 'The Pines has changed our lives for the better'. Comments such as these reflect the determined efforts of all staff to ensure that the schools is a safe and happy place.

Senior leaders work well together and complement each other's skills and knowledge. The opening of key stage 3 provision has been a challenge, and ensuring that you have a leader with experience in this phase has helped to make certain that the expansion has gone smoothly.

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that the new accommodation met the wide range of needs of the pupils in your school. At times, aspects of this have been a challenge. As the accommodation is a refurbishment and not purpose-built; the classroom sizes and their layout have not always been ideal for the needs of some of the pupils in your care. However, these challenges seem to have been largely overcome and you have ensured that shortcomings in the accommodation are not having a negative impact on the quality of education that you provide. There are also some advantages to the new accommodation. Older pupils have benefited from being taught in well-appointed specialised classrooms for subjects such as art, science and music. Each phase within the school also has access to a food technology room, which helps to support the teaching of life skills.

You were also asked to increase the amount of highly effective teaching. There are still improvements needed in the quality of teaching and learning. A considerable number of the staff have joined the school since the last inspection. This has been an additional challenge for leaders, as the changes have made embedding new initiatives more difficult.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's systems and procedures for keeping pupils safe are effective. Record-keeping is thorough and systematic. Safeguarding documentation is now stored electronically to ensure that information can be accessed or, when appropriate, shared efficiently.

Governors have all received general safeguarding training and understand the issues facing the school, particularly the vulnerability of pupils in their care. Leaders have ensured that all staff are trained in the 'Prevent' duty. Governors' understanding of the risks posed by extremism is adequate; however, it is less well developed than that of the school leaders.

Risk assessments, including those developed for individual pupils, are comprehensive. Leaders share these risk assessments with staff through the electronic system for managing behaviour and risk. Risk assessments for off-site visits help to ensure that pupils with complex behaviour are well supported.

The behaviour of pupils observed during the inspection was good, and the school's records confirm this is normally the case. Behaviour records show that any incidents of challenging or inappropriate behaviour are recorded in detail, and these records form part of the discussion when leaders are monitoring the impact of a pupil's individual behaviour plan. There has been a significant reduction in the number of incidents when physical intervention was needed. During the inspection, behaviour

was well managed by staff, who intervened, when necessary, and used time-out strategies to de-escalate any emerging tensions.

During weekly staff briefings, a 'child study' is shared. This helps all staff to understand and support an individual child's current needs. As a result, appropriate support and care is available from the whole school team, which supports the behaviour, care and safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have provided an effective curriculum in all key stages. In key stages 1 and 2, the curriculum is organised into formal and informal arrangements for each year group. Leaders give careful thought to pupils' needs and, where appropriate, pupils have formal teaching or experience a more play and experience-based curriculum. This means that pupils' needs are met effectively.
- In Years 7 and 8, pupils receive a more formal curriculum to help develop their knowledge, skills and understanding and prepare them for study in later years. A large proportion of these pupils are making good progress. Teachers support pupils effectively, through their knowledge and understanding of autistic spectrum disorders. However, they do not yet use the specialist facilities to their full advantage.
- Leaders have worked with the external partners such as the Birmingham Hippodrome to improve the curriculum. During the inspection, inspectors observed pupils engaged in music and movement for a story-telling activity. Children listened intently, followed instructions delivered through song and retold the story through actions. This was an enjoyable and effective way to support pupils' communication and social skills, as well as encourage self-expression
- Children make a sound start to their education. The curriculum in the early years focuses on each child's skills, interests and needs. Many children start school with very limited communication skills, and teachers support their development of speech and communication effectively.
- Pupils benefit from an environment which is organised to support their needs. Staff encourage pupils to develop their independence, through use of individual learning spaces. However, at times, staff do not monitor pupils' learning when they are working independently, and some bad habits develop, for example poor pencil grip.
- Staff support pupils of all abilities, needs and backgrounds to make good progress. They use pupil premium funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. The funding is used appropriately to fund speech and language therapy, which means that pupils receive regular access to individualised input delivered by qualified therapists. Parents are very positive about the impact of this on their children's progress.
- The school supports pupils' transitions into and during school very well. Leaders establish good links with parents through home visits and meetings. This helps to alleviate anxieties that parents have about their children starting school. Similarly, leaders have given very careful thought to the transition of pupils into

key stage 3. They give individual support to parents and pupils through the annual review process, information sharing events and experience days.

- Leaders have begun to develop links with careers advisory services to support pupils within key stage 3. They have already made links with a local secondary school which has well-established contacts with work experience providers and local businesses. However, pupils who are currently in Year 8 are not yet getting access to careers education to help them to become fully prepared for the next steps in their education.
- Senior leaders carefully analyse assessment information to plan for curriculum change and inform pupil progress meetings. Most teachers use assessment information effectively to inform their teaching. Occasionally there is a lack of challenge for individual pupils.
- Recently, the school has altered its approach to individual learning targets. Targets are now more personalised and focus on pupils' social, emotional and communication skills. All classes have careful records of these targets. However, not all staff use these consistently to focus on pupils' individual needs during lessons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve the provision in key stage 3, by providing greater access to specialist subject-specific teaching, and careers advice
- further improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - using personalised targets more effectively in lessons
 - ensuring that teachers provide the right level of challenge to all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Lowry
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leadership team. They visited classes across the school, observed learning and looked at work in pupils' books.

Inspectors talked to parents informally at the start of the day and scrutinised

documentation relating to safeguarding, self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.

The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and spoke to the school improvement partner. The views of parents were evaluated through the 30 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. Inspectors also used the 43 responses to Ofsted's staff survey to establish staff views. There were no responses by pupils to an online pupil questionnaire.