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Mr Richard Berry
Headteacher
Sky College
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Dear Mr Berry

Short inspection of Sky College

Following my visit to the school on 13 February 2019 with Martin Bragg, 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 January 2015.

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.**

You have a clear aim which is to prepare pupils for their next steps in education or employment. You and your staff team do this by supporting pupils to learn how to manage their emotions and by developing their confidence, self-esteem, and resilience. As a result, most pupils move on to successful placements at local colleges, or into employment.

A strong sense of teamwork permeates the school. Staff appreciate the consideration of their professional development needs and say that they are supported well by the leadership team. The leader for teaching and learning ensures that staff receive frequent feedback and helpful advice. Support from staff enables you to manage changes effectively.

Relationships between pupils and staff are generally positive. In lessons, many pupils apply themselves well to their learning and want to succeed. For example, pupils learn to prepare food and cook meals, and some continue this interest and pursue college courses in food or catering.

An area for improvement at the previous inspection was to improve behaviour and to keep exclusion rates low. Since then, there have been considerable additional pressures on the school through sudden large increases in the number of pupils

requiring places. You are working closely with local authority officers to ensure that future pupil admissions are planned more carefully.

Pupils who arrive have often attended many different schools in the past and, therefore, many need some time to settle and to understand the rules and boundaries. Increases in behaviour incidents often follow these spikes in pupil admissions.

As a result, the numbers of reported behaviour incidents are high. However, you can show that through the skill of your staff and the therapeutic support offered to pupils, the number of incidents has decreased each year over the past three years. As a pupil who recently arrived at the school explained, 'We understand each other here because we've all got the same problems. Staff listen to us and help us to manage behaviour better, but it takes time.'

Since the previous inspection, you have secured a change of direction in how the school manages and responds to the behavioural challenges presented by most pupils. Training events support staff to increase their understanding of how pupils' behaviour represents a response to the challenges that they face. Therapeutic approaches help to meet pupils' emotional needs. There is a pro-active approach to working more closely with parents. Because of these strategies, exclusions have sharply decreased each year and are low.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong. The experienced designated safeguarding lead works closely and effectively with the safeguarding team to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors keep a watch over safeguarding processes. For example, the governor lead for safeguarding is a frequent visitor and checks recruitment processes. There is a log of these visits, although actual agreed actions are not noted.

The safeguarding team track and check the training provided to staff. Frequent reminders and updates, including information about local risks such as county lines, ensure that safeguarding issues are a focus for all. A key feature of how well staff work to keep pupils safe is their communication with parents and families. A family liaison officer keeps close contact with families, including during periods of absence. Pupils describe the school as a safe place and they are confident to talk to staff if they have any worries. The local authority agrees that this is a safe school where leaders continually look to make improvements to practice and do all they can to ensure that pupils are secure and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Together, we agreed some areas to look at during the inspection. One agreed focus was to look at the quality of pupils' work across both academic and practical subjects. You are currently reorganising your leadership team to reflect changes in the numbers and ages of pupils as well as to manage staff changes

that are taking place. The new structure is not yet complete. Therefore, leaders' roles and responsibilities, including those responsible for checking the quality of core subjects across the school, are not yet clear. As a result, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of pupils' work. This was an area to improve at the previous inspection.

- You ensure that the curriculum is rich and varied and takes account of pupils' needs and interests. Practical lessons such as food technology, art, outdoor education, physical education and activities that contribute towards achieving the Duke of Edinburgh's Award are popular. Pupils apply themselves well during these activities.
- However, teachers' expectations and pupils' motivation to succeed are not consistent across subjects. Subject leadership is developing but not yet embedded. For example, leaders have not ensured that pupils develop and apply their writing skills across a range of subjects. Pupils' workbooks show that the development of core skills, particularly writing, is inconsistent. Too often, work is unfinished and poorly presented.
- We also looked at how individual plans support pupils' aspirations for their futures and understanding of their next steps. Staff help pupils to be ambitious and to discover interests and talents that they may not have been previously aware of. Starting with the pupils' education, health and care plan, staff gather a wealth of information about pupils' strengths and their needs.
- A 'Sky learning plan' brings this knowledge, as well as a description of how the school allocates resources and interventions, together in one document. However, these plans are still new and are still developing. They do not clearly identify and prioritise measurable, achievable development points. As a result, pupils are not always aware of their next steps and therefore how to make good progress towards the aspirations they have for their futures.
- Finally, we explored how well leaders are improving attendance for pupils. Leaders can show the work they do with families and the positive difference this can make to pupils' attendance. You place pupils' safety at the forefront and keep in regular contact with families during periods of absence. To promote good attendance, you involve other agencies and take stringent action, as necessary.
- However, attendance remains a top priority for the school and sits firmly on the school development plan. This is because the overall attendance for the school has been too low over recent years. Despite being a focus for improvement, it remains too low for too many pupils. Although some pupils, including residential pupils, do attend well, a few pupils have very low or no attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels have clear roles and responsibilities and can therefore contribute to the quality of education provided by the school
- expectations are consistently high across all subjects

- pupils successfully develop their core skills, particularly in writing
- the processes and systems for evaluating pupils' progress provide pupils with precise next steps for improvement
- pupils' attendance continues to improve so that more pupils attend school more often
- the partnership work with the local authority results in better management of pupil admissions so that behaviour incidents continue to decrease.

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

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Alongside senior leaders, inspectors observed learning and time between lessons in learning walks around the school and at the base close to the school. Inspectors had several meetings with senior and middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and the officer from the local authority who works with the school.

A range of pupils' plans, work and assessments were looked at. School documents were scrutinised including the school's own evaluation, the improvement plan and documents related to attendance, behaviour, recruitment and safeguarding.

There were no responses on Parent View or an online survey for pupils. However, inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the day to gather their views about the school. The 17 responses to an online survey for staff were taken into account as well as views taken at a meeting with staff.