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Mrs Kerrie Henton
Principal
Stone Soup Academy
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Dear Mrs Henton

Short inspection of Stone Soup Academy

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019 with Jo Ward, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This unique school is a vibrant and welcoming place, where pupils are supported to develop their confidence, self-esteem and education. The excellent relationships built up over time ensure that the individual needs of pupils are at the centre of everything the school does on a daily basis. Pupils state that they enjoy coming to school and they are safe and supported to learn. The curriculum is relevant and interesting. This is supported by the very effective use of extremely well-thought-out strategies to maintain the well-being of pupils.

During a time of change, including changes in the leadership team and in governance, you and the governors have led and managed the school skilfully. You have ensured that the outstanding strengths have been sustained, for example in the school's approach to nurturing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You and the leadership team have continued to create new opportunities and educational experiences for pupils. This has enabled most pupils to make excellent progress. Consequently, they achieve strong outcomes at GCSE or equivalent levels. The wide range of social and age-appropriate educational opportunities prepares them very well for transition into college, apprenticeships or employment.

You, the governors and staff are highly ambitious for the future of the school, and have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and their commitment to work. The engagement team (the team of staff that supports pupils, teachers and parents and

carers) is very skilled and provides a high level of safeguarding support and advice to pupils and their families. The promotion of good attendance and punctuality is always a key focus. The school staff provide special support for pupils when they are not in school. There is excellent communication between the host schools and Stone Soup Academy.

The governing body is highly effective and provides sustained strategic direction for leaders. Governors closely check on, and evaluate, the work of the school. They are effective in both supporting leaders and holding them to account. Governors promote intensively the work of the school in the local community and beyond. They are proud of the work of the school and attest to its continual improvements over time.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve pupils' qualifications, by broadening the provision of GCSE courses and by extending partnerships with other schools. Leaders and the governing body have ensured that staff have progressively developed the curriculum by developing partnerships with local schools, colleges and employers. There continues to be a strong emphasis on English language, literature and mathematics teaching at GCSE. The Stone Soup curriculum has broadened to include a wider range of vocational subjects, GCSE short courses and life skills programmes of study. These are accredited and lead directly to further study.

New courses on offer include art and design, photography, sport, media, construction, catering, motor vehicle maintenance, animal care, French, religious education (RE) and mechanics. In addition, individual courses are brokered for individual pupils, for example, GCSE biology.

The overall quality of teaching is strong. However, teachers do not always take account of pupils' prior learning abilities and experiences. On occasion, they do not sufficiently tailor tasks to meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities, and as a consequence, pupils' interest wanes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors ensure that a strong culture of safeguarding exists throughout the school. The two school sites are secure. Pupils state that they feel safe and are well supported both in school and outside by the dedicated engagement team staff. Staff who responded to the Ofsted survey unanimously reported that pupils are safe at school. This excellent provision lays the foundations for promoting strong progress and fostering positive, trusting relationships. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are fit for purpose. The staff are vigilant, and all have received up-to-date training. Records, including those related to training, are regularly checked and reviewed. These are detailed, and diligently and securely kept. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns and ensure that external agencies are involved when appropriate. You and the team take great pride in caring for pupils and their welfare. Multi-agency teams work effectively with

school staff to protect pupils from sexual exploitation and involvement in crime. They provide specialist support when needed.

All staff are very aware of the social and emotional challenges faced by individual pupils and work effectively to overcome these. Pupils and staff are provided with a range of specialist training. Training and assemblies help pupils cope with, and deal with, street life, including assault and knife crime. The school is engaged in a number of innovative projects aimed at the prevention of knife crime, for example in the National Justice Museum's joint work with the Ben Kinsella Trust.

In addition, pupils learn about keeping themselves safe on the internet. This includes the potential dangers of radicalisation and grooming and about how to address any instances of bullying, racism or homophobia. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well within school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have a very strong vision for sustaining and developing the provision. They are highly ambitious and have created a culture of high expectations and positive change. All staff work determinedly to improve pupils' progress and outcomes. Stone Soup Academy is a place where the mission statement 'Creating unimagined futures' is a reality. Self-evaluation is accurate and realistic. Areas for improvement are identified and actions are taken to tackle them. Governors rigorously hold leaders to account and play an active role, checking on all areas of the school's work.
- Typically, pupils enter the school with a record of poor attendance and/or behaviour, underachievement, and/or a history of being out of school for long periods of time. Most pupils' attendance improves after they start at the school. Overall figures remain below the average for mainstream schools. However, individual pupils' attendance represents highly significant improvements and there have been a number of transformative improvements for a number of pupils who experience a difficult home life.
- The small number of fixed-term exclusions are used as a means to help pupils re-focus and reflect on their behaviour. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is positive. Most pupils are polite and courteous to visitors, other pupils and staff members. Where behavioural breaches arise, they are quickly, sensitively and fairly dealt with so that pupils can once again focus on their learning.
- Most pupils' significantly improved attendance and behaviour help to prepare them well for their next steps in life, for example attending a local college, gaining an apprenticeship and entering the world of employment. Stone Soup has a consistently strong record in ensuring that pupils are supported during and after this transition.
- The quality of teaching overall is very strong. Pupils make at least good progress, and outcomes are outstanding for the vast majority of pupils. There are lots of examples when teaching is matched specifically to pupils' interests and aspirations for the future. The quality of the partnership between members of the

engagement team and the teachers enhances pupils' progress and learning.

- There is a strong focus on the promotion of English and mathematics. Reading is promoted well, and pupils make significant gains from their individual starting points. However, not all teachers take into account pupils' prior learning. Some teachers miss opportunities to promote the depth and breadth of subject-specific knowledge. Some pupils do not routinely respond to teachers' written feedback as the school's assessment and marking policy requires.
- Since the time of the last inspection, leaders and governors have paid particular attention to broadening the curriculum and making effective partnerships with other educational bodies, voluntary organisations and local and national social enterprise charities. The curriculum is now broad and balanced and includes a wealth of enrichment experiences and a wide range of qualifications to enable pupils to rebuild their confidence, experience success and prepare for their next steps in life.
- Pupils spoke enthusiastically with inspectors about their positive experiences of attending a careers convention in Birmingham, taster days at local colleges and universities, and of visiting speakers coming into the school. They are proud to belong to this school and all believe they have improved both their confidence and self-worth since joining Stone Soup.
- Parents' and carers' comments are very positive, typically saying, 'This school has made an outstanding improvement to my child.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching is further improved, by taking more fully into account the prior learning experiences and abilities of pupils, and matching work to pupils' needs so that it consistently challenges and interests them.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Nixon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, a range of documentation was analysed including: the school's own improvement plans and self-evaluation analysis, the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings, a wide

range of reports sent to the governors and a range of the school's policies, procedures and protocols. Inspectors also examined the information the school provides for families, such as information relating to safeguarding and child protection. They also looked at data relating to attendance and punctuality, and information and case records relating to fixed-term exclusions and a range of risk assessments contained in case files.

Together with the principal and assistant principal, inspectors jointly observed lessons and undertook joint learning walks at both school sites. Inspectors and leaders scrutinised pupils' workbooks in class and separately across a wide range of subjects.

Inspectors discussed the work of the school in meetings with senior leaders and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. A telephone call also took place with the commissioning schools. Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the day of the inspection and in meetings with two groups of pupils from key stage 4. Inspectors also spoke with the leader responsible for behaviour and attendance and with middle leaders.

Inspectors considered the range and quality of information provided on the school's website, information from the Ofsted staff survey and parents' comments received during the inspection.