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Ms Libby Duggan
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Duggan

Short inspection of Southfield School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 2019 with Tania Perry, 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 November 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

At the heart of this good-quality work is the desire to meet the needs of individual pupils. Your calm and quiet determination to improve the school further is evident but you have been hampered in this drive because of a number of staff changes and the difficulties you experienced in recruiting the right people to leadership positions. However, you have now strengthened your leadership team and, as a result, you and your staff are in a good position to further the drive and vision for the school that you clearly describe for all stakeholders.

The school provides a stimulating learning environment and is a calm and happy place. Daily routines are well established and this provides security and stability for the pupils. As a result, the vast majority enjoy school, attend well, feel safe and are keen to learn.

The positive relationship between staff and pupils is a real strength. It is evident that all staff know the pupils really well. This, combined with the passion, enthusiasm and commitment that all staff have to ensuring that every child is motivated and engaged in their learning, means that all pupils are challenged to do their very best. As a result, the progress pupils make from their starting points is excellent.

Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school with many commenting on the 'amazing progress' their children had made and the support and dedication of the staff who 'go above and beyond' what could be expected.

The appointment of a family support worker has been instrumental in creating this positive relationship with parents. By organising regular social events and parent workshops, she has given families the opportunity to meet and socialise with each other, as well as being a 'sounding board' for them.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have, as asked, revised and extended the systems for assessing pupils' progress, and there is now a systematic approach to gathering the information and using it effectively to ensure that individual needs are met.

Governors are now very proactive and are not afraid to challenge you. They have wide-ranging skills and experience and share your vision for continued improvement. Through their focused school visits and the detailed information they receive from you, they now have a very clear picture about the quality of teaching and learning in the school. They are aware of where there are potential weaknesses and are equally aware of what leaders are doing to address these.

Safeguarding is effective.

It is very apparent that you have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school and that all staff are aware of the procedures they should follow if they have a concern about a pupil. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Despite not finding an updated child protection policy on your website, we quickly established that all staff are familiar with the latest guidance and that, although not put on the website, the policy was in fact reviewed in November 2018. Indeed, you have worked diligently to ensure that all staff receive regular safeguarding training and that appropriate checks are made on the staff that you employ. You work closely with other external professionals to ensure that pupils get all the support they need.

Pupils are well supervised and cared for, including those with specific and complex needs. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in an age- and ability-appropriate way. Almost all pupils and parents feel that pupils are safe and well cared for. You routinely review detailed behaviour records to constantly improve your support of individual pupils.

Inspection findings

- You have not been afraid to continually review and adapt the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils and this has enabled them all to make good or outstanding progress from their starting points. You now offer a '3 phase curriculum' that is based on helping all pupils to develop their language and social communication skills, emotional and sensory regulation, independent life

skills, and mental and emotional well-being in the most appropriate way.

- Planning is very responsive, on a session-by-session basis, to the needs and abilities of individuals. Teachers are very creative in the way they plan tasks which capture the pupils' interests and motivate them.
- Enjoyment for all was evident in all lessons, seen through positive engagement in learning. Staff used specific praise to highlight and comment on pupils' achievement to enable pupils to remain focused and help them understand what they have done well. Very clear and established routines enable pupils to feel safe, ready to learn and demonstrate confidence with any contribution they offer.
- Total communication strategies, such as signing, symbol support and communication profiles, are used by all staff to support pupils' understanding of language use. Visual cues are used well as transactional support so that pupils understand where they are and what they are doing within their day.
- You have used some of the additional funding you receive for physical education (PE) and sport to employ an occupational therapist for one half day a week, and this has been instrumental in ensuring that sensory therapies have been integrated into the curriculum, enabling pupils to meet the sensory and physical outcomes in their education, health and care plans.
- Although staff are trained in the use of specific strategies, such as the use of visual support, social stories, anxiety maps and the use of de-escalation techniques, you highlighted the need to have an ongoing programme of professional development for teachers and assistants so that these approaches were implemented in a consistent manner across the school.
- There is now an effective monitoring cycle in place that has improved as a result of the phase leaders and the now stable leadership team being in place. Although they are a very effective team, they would also benefit from specific leadership training to support succession planning and their own professional development.
- Through your performance management cycle, you have identified that teaching in key stage 2 is much stronger than in key stage 1, and this is a view that is shared by your school improvement partner. You do have plans in place to address this, but staff absences have made this difficult.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching matches the best that is evident in the school by making sure that all staff plan activities that help all pupils to make rapid progress
- all reviewed policies are uploaded on to the website as soon as possible so that parents have up-to-date information
- they implement a training programme that will help to make sure that agreed approaches and strategies are consistently embedded across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Walker
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you and your leadership team, two governors, your phase leaders and your drama therapist. Inspectors made visits to lessons with senior leaders and looked at pupils' files and books. They talked to pupils informally about their learning and school experiences.

They also scrutinised school documents, including the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, safeguarding records, policies and procedures, behaviour and attendance records, and minutes of governors' meetings. The views of parents from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the school's own parent and pupil surveys were reviewed. The 11 responses to the online staff survey were also considered.