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Mr Sean Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Williams

Short inspection of The Forge Secondary Short Stay School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 2018 with Derek Barnes, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your staff care deeply about the pupils you work with. You have a well-researched approach to education that prioritises pupil safety and welfare. As a result, the school is a safe place to learn, where pupils make significant improvements to their life chances. The overwhelming majority of pupils leave the school in Year 11 well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training. In 2017, for example, almost all pupils left with GCSE grades that represented good progress from their starting points. Pupils currently at the school are making good progress in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils' behaviour is typically respectful and improving. You and your staff have developed a safe and thriving school community. For example, the start of the school day begins with a welcoming, thoughtful meeting between all staff and pupils. Each person is invited to say what is on their mind, what worries them or has given them cause for pride. This ethos of mutual support continues throughout the day, in the way you and your staff listen to pupils, encourage them and take time to nurture their development. Pupils told inspectors that they feel valued and respected. One of the many positive messages and displays around the school says: 'It doesn't matter where you've been. It matters where you're going to.' You and your staff live out this belief in your leadership and teaching. All pupils join one of the school's Family Groups, each of which is led by a team of skilled pastoral leaders and tutors. In this way, pupils develop a sense of belonging and an ability to form healthy relationships. At the same time, you encourage a disciplined approach from pupils to their academic learning.

When pupils join the school, their starting points are usually considerably lower than other pupils of a similar age. All pupils in the school have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and all are disadvantaged. You arrange effective support for pupils, such as one-to-one tuition in literacy and numeracy, and training for staff in counselling and therapeutic methods. As a consequence, pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress.

You take professional development of staff seriously and staff feel valued and supported as a result. For example, all staff have the opportunity to study for a foundation degree with the University of West England. You train staff extensively in the psychology of child development and this leads to teachers being able to help pupils in a well-informed and sympathetic manner.

Your governing body is very strong. They have a wealth of relevant experience and are skilled at challenging and supporting you. Governors are committed to the vision you have shared with them and are ambitious for pupils and staff. They understand the school and have an accurate view of what needs further improvement. They agree with you and your leadership team that the curriculum needs further development and that pupils would benefit from following vocational courses in key stage 4. Governors have helped organise activities for pupils, for example a whole school breakfast session and helping pupils read with younger pupils at a nearby first school.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to make two specific improvements. These were to ensure that teaching enables pupils to make even better progress in their learning and to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent. Inspectors explored these areas in detail and found that you and your staff have been effective in addressing both areas for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff are well trained, especially in the kinds of barriers to safeguarding faced by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Staff listen to pupils' concerns carefully and know how to help pupils express any worries or concerns they have. An effective personal, social and health education curriculum enables pupils to learn, for example about the dangers of radicalisation, and how to stay safe online and when using mobile phones. Pupils say there is no bullying at the school. They also say they think staff would deal with any bullying quickly, should it occur. You and your staff work closely with other safeguarding agencies in the local authority to keep pupils safe. You make sure that risk assessments are thorough and effective. For example, you have comprehensively scrutinised the safety arrangements of the alternative provider you use and liaise closely with them to make sure pupils' welfare is well managed.

Inspection findings

- We agreed a number of areas to explore during the inspection. These areas linked to areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The first area was how well pupils are challenged by their work and make even better progress. We saw strong progress over time in a wide range of pupils' workbooks in subjects across the curriculum, including English and mathematics. You make sure that staff understand pupils' abilities well. The baseline assessments made when pupils join the school are thorough and detailed. This allows pupils to be set challenging and achievable targets. School records support what inspectors found in pupils' workbooks – that pupils are making good progress.
- Staff plan well for pupils' learning and give them work that interests and challenges them. Typical examples included an English lesson in which pupils were in role as investigators researching a crime scene. They eagerly discussed the evidence they found and what it might mean, drawing inferences from what they read. In an art lesson, pupils were concentrating intensely on their work, absorbed by the complex line drawing activity. In a computer studies lesson, pupils were able to teach others how to use a program with clear and precise instructions. During the inspection, we met with former pupils of the school. They were eager to tell us how the school had given them skills and qualifications to go on to college and high-quality apprenticeships.
- Another focus of the inspection was how well you and your staff help to improve pupils' behaviour. School records show that pupils develop skills of self-discipline, confidence and self-esteem. Inspectors saw evidence of this in lessons and generally in pupils' behaviour around the school, including at break and lunchtimes. Staff are skilled at preventing poor behaviour before it arises and encouraging positive attitudes.
- Staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently, giving rewards and sanctions fairly and keeping in close contact with parents and carers. The rates of exclusions are falling over time because you and your staff help pupils to be clear about the school's expectations and give practical help to enable them to manage their behaviour independently. A typical comment from pupils was, 'You're not just a number here. You're a person.'
- Pupils value the one-to-one support they receive to help them with their personal development. Pupils told inspectors how they felt they had a much more positive attitude to school since joining The Forge. Teaching assistants work well with pupils, helping them to feel calm and settled, in addition to supporting the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils also make improvements in their attitudes when they are on alternative provision. For example, most pupils do well on the Duke of Edinburgh award.
- We scrutinised the attendance of pupils at the school. You and your staff are taking effective action to improve rates of attendance for most pupils. You work closely with parents and other agencies. Staff make daily calls home whenever a pupil is absent. Your attendance team and Family Group leaders give helpful counselling and guidance to pupils who need to improve attendance. Your pastoral staff make home visits with colleagues in the local authority. You keep families supported and help them with practical ideas. As a result, rates of attendance are rising overall and getting closer to national averages.

- There are still a few pupils who do not attend well enough. You are strenuous in your efforts to support and challenge their low attendance. You do not shy away from robust action and have identified this as a high priority in your development planning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum is reviewed to decide whether including more vocational subjects would help pupils to be even better prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training
- attendance continues to improve towards national averages, especially for the few pupils whose attendance is still too low.

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

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors observed learning in lessons and workbooks throughout key stages 3 and 4 and conducted a joint work scrutiny with members of the middle leadership team. They held a range of meetings, including with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, representatives of the governing body, current and former pupils. Inspectors spoke with two local authority representatives and leaders of schools that place pupils with you. They scrutinised the single central record, a range of documents, plans and actions aimed at keeping pupils safe, school self-evaluation and improvement planning documents and other policies. Inspectors considered responses from the school's own staff questionnaire and feedback it has received from parents. An inspector scrutinised alternative provision, speaking with pupils and with the provider of JP Alternative Provision in Cannock.