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Mrs Gill Cartwright
Headteacher
The Old Park School
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Dear Mrs Cartwright

Short inspection of The Old Park School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2018 with Amanda Clugston, 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 Old Park School was judged to be outstanding in September 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the excellent quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and your governors share a powerful common vision for the school. Senior leaders are dynamic and forward thinking and leadership at all levels is exceptionally strong. Staff are inspired and motivated by the senior leadership team. All staff strive to ensure that the pupils have access to high-quality education and care. Staff training and support complement the dedication shown by staff to meeting the needs of all pupils. The high expectations and exceptionally strong leadership ensure that all stakeholders continue to aspire to improvement.

Good and outstanding teaching enables pupils to make excellent progress, not just in the academic areas but also in their personal and social development skills. Lessons and classroom environments are designed to stimulate pupils' learning and staff use a range of communication aids to make sure that learning is accessible to pupils. Middle leaders work collaboratively with staff to plan effective and stimulating activities, to meet the needs of individual pupils. The progress made by pupils in the early years, pupils in the post-16 provision and pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities is exceptionally strong as teachers plan activities to motivate curiosity and develop essential life skills. For example, older pupils demonstrated consistent coin recognition and value of money skills which they were able to transfer to shopping and fundraising for the recent Children in Need event.

Excellent relationships between staff and pupils result in pupils feeling valued and confident. The compassion that staff show to all pupils is heart-warming and all pupils are encouraged to develop independence skills from the moment that they arrive in school. Pupils' medical needs are clearly understood by staff and the support from the school nursing team enables all pupils to access some form of learning despite any illness that they may encounter by offering additional support while pupils are at home following medical interventions.

Parents and carers are extremely supportive of school leaders and staff. Almost all parents who shared views with the inspectors were complimentary about the quality of the education and care that their children receive. Parents feel assured that their children are safe and well cared for and are 'incredibly grateful' for the support that they are provided with.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong safeguarding culture is evident at The Old Park School. You and the leadership team have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and take account of the needs of the pupils in the school. Protecting pupils and keeping them safe is a key priority for everyone. Safeguarding training is regularly provided for all staff so they know what to do and who to contact when they have any concerns, and senior leaders follow these up immediately. Clear protocols are in place for dealing with absences and pupils missing from school.

Throughout the school, pupils are taught about the potential risks and dangers they might face as they grow up. You have recently introduced a number of new initiatives which focus on promoting safety and these are proudly displayed in school.

Logs of behaviour incidents and analysis of behaviours show that the use of physical interventions has significantly reduced due to the help that the behaviour support team provides to pupils, their families and school staff.

Inspection findings

- Pupils in the early years are making exceptional progress from their starting points. Their progress is tracked rigorously, frequently and consistently across the key stage. The lead for the early years persistently ensures that learning journeys are clearly annotated and intervention strategies are applied.
- Strong modelling by teaching staff, ably assisted by highly effective teaching assistants, ensures that robust routines are in place and each activity is an opportunity for pupils to learn.
- Teaching is well planned and differentiated and, as a result, pupils make exceptional progress as work is matched to individual pupils or groups. Pupils are provided with appropriate challenge and, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were able to recognise number bonds, successfully adding and subtracting two- and three-digit numbers and finding the place value of coins.

- Leaders have focused their attention on introducing a new curriculum and assessment system for academic and non-academic subjects. The new, bespoke curriculum places a strong emphasis on the learning of skills. These skills are focused on physical development, communication, sensory processing and social skills. Understandably, the new curriculum has yet to be fully embedded.
- The focus on communication is evident throughout school, with staff using a range of tools to encourage pupils to communicate with adults and their peers. Cross-curricular links, using technology, are a clear strength in teaching and learning. For example, inspectors saw lessons in which pupils used literacy and computer skills to solve mathematical reasoning problems with success.
- Additional funding has been used effectively to increase resources to provide for pupils' sensory needs. Additional equipment enables pupils to work in a relaxed, calming environment. Tactile panels strategically placed around the school allow pupils to enjoy pragmatic learning in areas not specifically designed for teaching.
- At the end of key stage 4 and post-16, pupils are entered for entry-level accreditation in both academic and vocational subjects. Older learners are well prepared for life after school as they are provided with a range of careers advice and information. Through the careers days and links with local colleges and local businesses, pupils are able to develop an understanding about job opportunities that are available. The focus on employment potential and independent life skills is a clear strength as pupils take part in enterprise activities, projects with other local schools and colleges, community fundraising days and ASDAN courses. Valuable work experience opportunities are provided, including in local supermarkets, food courts, charity shops and play centres. The school works closely with local businesses, offering full support to ensure that all young people's needs are understood and met.
- Personal and social development is at the core of all aspects of the curriculum at The Old Park School. Staff take pride in providing every opportunity to develop all pupils' life skills by creating classrooms that are well designed to allow pupils the freedom to take risks in a safe environment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum and assessment system is firmly embedded by making sure that all staff follow the new processes.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Ellis
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and senior leaders to discuss progress since the last inspection, your school's self-evaluation and the key lines of enquiry for this inspection.

We spoke to several members of staff about the curriculum, assessment, behaviour and welfare, and attendance. I spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and the designated lead for safeguarding. I met with the external school improvement partner. We visited classrooms to observe pupils and staff at work and observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime.

We looked at samples of pupils' work from all key stages, including post-16. We looked at many documents, including the school improvement plan, records of local authority visits, minutes from governing body meetings, the single central record and staff files. We looked at nine responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire. We considered the responses to the school's parent and pupil surveys. We also considered the views of eight staff who completed the online questionnaire.