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Mr S Garside
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Garside

Short inspection of Vale of Evesham School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2016 with Sarah Ashley, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

You became headteacher around 18 months ago. You have formed a cohesive team with your senior leaders, and with the executive principal of the academy trust. All of you, together with your staff team, are united in your drive for excellence for the pupils at Vale of Evesham.

There is a calm, relaxed atmosphere in the school. Staff and pupils chat and laugh together. Pupils move to their different sessions around the school with ease, discussing what they see or what they have been doing. Yet you and your staff are far from relaxed about achievement. Staff are determined that pupils will achieve their very best. They plan, teach and support with this in mind but they convey their ambitions to pupils skilfully and without placing them under undue pressure. There is a clear sense of pride among the school community. Wherever my colleague and I went during the inspection, pupils and staff alike were pleased to show us what they were doing. The most able pupils described clearly the range of experiences they have at Vale of Evesham.

The school is highly inclusive. Pupils with all different types of needs are fully included in, and feel part of, their age-related class group. Within each day and week, however, they spend time in different groups according to their social and learning needs. This allows pupils to make excellent progress academically and socially. The cohesiveness of the school community was demonstrated really well at break and lunchtimes, when pupils played and socialised harmoniously together. Excellent attention has been paid to developing purposeful play, and some pupils have been trained to support others by organising games, such as 'What's the time Mr Wolf'.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Staff and pupils have mutual respect. The school places a strong emphasis on developing independence and resilience. This helps pupils to take responsibility for themselves and others, and to overcome aspects of their disabilities that might otherwise hold them back. Pupils accept and support each other. They respond well, often with great enthusiasm, to their lessons, extra-curricular opportunities, work in the community, and college courses.

Since the previous inspection, the needs of the children joining the early years foundation stage have become more complex. The school has adapted well to its new population. Careful attention is paid to physiotherapy programmes and to ensuring that pupils with physical disabilities are both fully included in their classes and have their individual needs met. There are carefully designed plans for pupils with serious medical conditions. The school makes every effort to stay in touch with pupils when they have to go to hospital for extended periods, for example by using video conferencing.

The school has worked systematically to improve writing since the previous inspection, from an already strong baseline. This was effective; however, the leader of the lower school is ambitious for writing to be even better for the younger pupils and continues to consider ways that the teaching of writing could be further improved. There has been a strong focus on reading more recently. A member of staff has all her time dedicated to reading interventions. There are new reading tests which are proving more useful than the previous ones and a well-organised, age-appropriate reading scheme. This more systematic approach to the teaching of reading is having a good impact overall and there are some striking examples of success for individuals.

Since the previous inspection, Vale of Evesham has become a lead school within a multi-academy trust of four schools. This structure is providing another layer of monitoring and accountability which is working well. You and your governors have played a key part in developing a 'data dashboard'. This is a well-thought-out tool that brings together a great deal of key information about the school's performance and is already proving informative for governors and leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You and your senior team see safeguarding as something that threads through all aspects of the school's work. Since you took up your post, you have prioritised safeguarding training for staff to build on the strong practice that already existed. You are well aware of the many ways that your pupils can be vulnerable in the wider community and you have tackled some serious issues head-on. For example, staff received detailed training about child sexual exploitation. At the same time, a group of older pupils who were, or could be, particularly vulnerable to this issue were placed on an in-depth course about how to keep themselves safe from predators. Likewise, the school is working hard to raise awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. A new governor with professional knowledge of this area is leading training for staff. There is a strong awareness of how to help pupils to have positive mental health and, again, staff have been trained in this area. A tailored programme of personal, social and health education concentrates strongly on helping pupils to express their emotions and experiences. Procedures are in place to help pupils use information and communication technology safely.

Good work has taken place with older pupils to help them to keep themselves safe. For example, they have taken part in the 'safe places' scheme with the support of local police and businesses. Sixth-form students explained how, if they were feeling concerned, bullied or unsafe when out in Evesham, they could go to one of the local businesses that displayed the safe places sign, or call the police via the phone number that they carried around. We discussed the possibility of extending this work to some of the other areas in which your pupils live.

Staff at all levels understand not only the basic principles of child protection but the reasons for what they do. They are vigilant, and are well aware of the actions they need to take if they think a child protection issue has arisen. Case files are very clear and detailed and actions are timely and extensive. Where the school does not receive external support as needed, leaders are persistent in challenging the appropriate authorities. Fortnightly meetings of the three designated safeguarding leads enable you to hold each other to account. Actions taken are queried, checked and challenged. Multi-agency safeguarding meetings are held every half term to review all cases and procedures. They include the safeguarding governor, the school nurse, the social worker and the designated leads. These are strategic and very well focused. We identified during the inspection that it would be valuable to include a check on the single central record from time to time during these meetings.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' needs vary from one year group to the next. The school carefully adapts both groupings and the curriculum on offer according to the needs of each class. In the past, for example, pupils have taken GCSE qualifications. These are not suitable for the current key stage 4 pupils but the school is aware that they are likely to be needed again for the current

Year 9 pupils. They are therefore keeping staff up to date with GCSE developments and planning to reintroduce them when appropriate.

- In the early years foundation stage, there is a strong focus on communication and independence. Lessons include an appropriate balance of free flow and guided activity to allow children to learn to make choices and to organise themselves. Physically disabled children are appropriately supported to learn key skills such as feeding themselves and moving around independently where they can. Staff use plenty of signing, clear speaking and symbols to aid all children's understanding and communication.
- The strong emphasis on independence and communication continues as pupils move through the school and pupils develop these aspects very well. The vast majority of pupils make good or excellent progress with their English and mathematics skills, as well as in other curriculum areas. Where pupils would be better placed in a mainstream school for some of their curriculum, this is arranged.
- In key stage 4, pupils begin to take qualifications according to their needs and abilities. They then have the chance to take others at a higher level over time. This allows them to work at their own pace and build on their prior learning. For example, some Year 10 and 11 pupils have just taken Entry Level 1 mathematics qualifications, and will go on to Entry Level 2, while others have already gained Entry Level 2 and are working on Entry Level 3.
- Functional skills qualifications are introduced in the sixth form to build towards college courses. However, the sixth form is focused not just on further qualifications but also on preparing students for the next stage of life after school. There is therefore a strong concentration on resilience, independence and social skills as well as literacy and numeracy. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme gives students the opportunity to really stretch themselves. Students have a choice of college courses, and in school are able to take various courses including horticulture, catering and art. Students take leadership roles within school, for example through the 'action group' and through sports teams. The school constantly reflects on how students can be better prepared for life after school. Students receive advice and guidance early on, and work experience helps them to know what is possible.
- Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are very well supported by the in-school autism resource centre (ARC), while remaining a full member of their classes. Programmes are carefully tailored to meet their social, interaction and communication needs, and these skills are then systematically practised in classes, leading to good transference of these valuable skills into their daily lives.
- Throughout the school, additional multi-agency support helps pupils to achieve. This is well organised and its desired impact is carefully considered when it is being planned and allocated.
- Day-to-day routines are smooth and help pupils to know what to expect. During the inspection, the start and end of the school day was well organised and safe. Lunch and breaktimes were calm. Staff and pupils were

clear that what inspectors saw was typical. The atmosphere at lunchtime in the dining room was positive and sociable. The younger pupils ate calmly and sensibly together in 'family groups'. The older pupils queued up to collect their lunch very patiently. However, the queue was very long and most pupils did not know, or had forgotten, what the choices were for lunch. The school has considered how to improve this situation and during the inspection it was discussed how queuing time could be better used to develop pupils' communication and choice-making skills.

- The school's careful tracking of information about behaviour suggested that some pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium would benefit from more interventions to support their behaviour and therefore their achievement. Action has been taken accordingly, and governors are keeping a close eye on how well new initiatives are working.
- The school is aware that, while attendance is good for many pupils, others need more support and challenge to attend well. Attendance targets are set where needed at annual reviews and are reviewed termly, but there is constant action to improve attendance where necessary, including the involvement of the family support worker. The attendance of children looked after is high.
- Pupils have a wide range of enrichment opportunities, including sports, arts and music. Many participate in residential visits, although most do not have this opportunity until Year 8. During the inspection, the school's tag rugby team was practising ready for their imminent tour to Ireland. The pupils played very well together as a team. They showed real understanding and skill. The team was very well led by a sixth-form student.
- The school plans very well for future changes in staffing and leadership. Careful attention is paid to staff's professional development. Staff have good opportunities to develop their skills and to take on different responsibilities within the school, which make them ready to take on promotion as appropriate. Apprentice assistants often become successful teaching assistants. Teaching assistants sometimes go on to become teachers. The views of staff who returned the questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive.
- Succession planning is also used well by the governing body – the chair mentors the vice-chair to be able to step up to become chair, then continues to support as vice-chair the next year. This is working well. Governors with appropriate skills are constantly sought.
- The governing body is well led, well organised, effective and ambitious. During the inspection, governors commented that being judged outstanding previously does not mean being perfect. Since the previous inspection they have been ambitious for the school to continue to improve. Each part of the school development plan has a link governor who gets to know the priority, what it means, and how the actions are being achieved. There is a clear focus on impact and the school development targets are a focus of each governing body meeting. Governors are therefore able to support and challenge the leaders who are in charge of each aspect.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors were extremely positive about the support that their children receive at the school, and the progress they are making.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- consider ways to make better use of the time pupils spend in the lunch queue, such as giving them menus to help them to be ready to choose their lunch
- ensure that even more regular checks are carried out on the school's essential administrative processes to ensure that all are of a suitably high standard
- consider introducing appropriate residential experiences for younger pupils.

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 County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I met with you, your senior leadership team, the chair of the governing body and two other governors and the executive principal of the academy trust. We met with 18 staff with various different roles, in two groups, to discuss safeguarding. We looked at a range of documentation, including the single central record of checks on staff, records relating to safeguarding, information about achievement, behaviour and attendance, and staff's responses to the Ofsted questionnaire. We observed pupils arriving at school in the morning. We visited short parts of lessons from the early years to the sixth form. In these visits we focused particularly on how well the school had adapted to its newer pupils with more complex needs, the provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum, and provision for the most able pupils. We observed the playground breaktime, the dining room at lunchtime and visited the tag rugby training session. I had a tour round the school with sixth-form students, and a discussion with them. Throughout the day, we spoke to pupils about their experience of school.