

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



10 November 2015

Ms Libby Duggan
Headteacher
Southfield School
Woods Avenue
Hatfield
Hertfordshire
AL10 8NN

Dear Ms Duggan

Short inspection of Southfield School

Following my visit to the school with Anthony Sharpe, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 13 October 2015, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your senior leaders have strengthened further the culture of high expectations and vibrant learning in the school since the last inspection. Senior leaders demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and make it their priority to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can. You lead by example and model the good practice you want to see.

You have a quiet authority which is underpinned by a deep and accurate evaluation of what the school does well and what needs to be done to improve it even further. You and your team use your expertise and skills well to inspire staff and create a culture of committed aspirations for all pupils. High-quality care, together with effective teaching and learning, permeate the school; this is not only beneficial for pupils but also for parents. Some of the school's work is highly skilled and nationally recognised for its quality, as demonstrated by the school's accreditation for autism.

Staff are inventive and enthusiastic; they bring fun and pleasure to learning. For example, children in the early years embarked joyfully on an inspirational bear hunt through porridge mud, spaghetti straw and paper grass. This activity fully involved both pupils and observers! Staff are willing to do whatever is necessary to engage

pupils in activities which help them to extend the boundaries of their learning and overcome any worry of failure.

Inspectors agree with the vast majority of parents, who say that they are confident that their children are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Parents say that the skills pupils gain in areas such as communication are improving relationships outside of school and are having a positive effect on their home life. Children are keen to come to school and are happy. Parents value the detailed and frequent information they receive from the school about their children's progress and well-being.

At the previous inspection, inspectors praised the gains made by children in the early years and the systems through which pupils were supported to become independent as a result of your close working with parents and carers. They highlighted a couple of points for improvement and leaders have taken action to tackle these areas. This has had clear impact:

- Teachers use a range of information, including that gathered from the pupils themselves, their parents and their previous schools, to identify the pupils' precise starting points, their interests and levels of attainment and determine when they join the school. Individual pupils' needs are complex, but teachers work hard to unravel and meet these needs when planning teaching. As a consequence, learning activities are well matched to pupils' interests and capabilities. Teachers are recording pupils' learning and progress with increasing accuracy, and this information is used well to plan the next steps in their learning.
- School leaders have utilised the school's new location to build good relationships with neighbouring schools. The positive benefits of activities, such as the singing and signing club, extend to pupils in local mainstream schools. These pupils now use supported signing to reinforce their own learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The tenacity shown by staff in following through any child protection issues or concerns, together with the detailed and high-quality records, ensure that the right support is made available for the child, not just at school but also at home.

The patient manner and care with which adults support children is the outcome of their regular and high-quality training. Staff willingly wait for pupils to communicate their needs and concerns; they enable them to tell their story through the wide range of communication tools and approaches they skilfully use. This is just another example of how staff go above and beyond all regular expectations to help their pupils. As a result, pupils say they feel safe and secure at school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and staff make every effort to ensure that all of the needs of pupils are well identified and met in the best way possible. Because external agencies do not always respond well enough to the school's requests for support, leaders take on more responsibility for meeting pupils' needs than they should.
- The level of detail given to analysing pupils' needs is very high. This means that staff often identify additional aspects of support for pupils that are not in their education, health and care plans. As a result, they make a significant difference to how well pupils achieve.
- Leaders have implemented a well-designed and creative curriculum that ensures pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop their skills and become more independent. Pupils are encouraged to use this independence to access new activities that are appropriate to their ever-changing needs.
- Pupils are set challenging targets and make at least good progress from their starting points. All leaders are ambitious in their expectations of pupils. Outcomes are high across a broad range of subjects and within strands of those subjects. Teachers set work that is well matched to targets on pupils' plans, and all staff use their initiative when meeting the individual needs of each pupil so that they are best supported to make progress in their learning.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is strong and continues to improve. Senior leaders routinely observe teaching and learning, and give developmental feedback to which staff listen and act on. As a result, teachers become increasingly confident, innovative and creative in their work.
- The quality of pupils' behaviour and the school's care for their well-being are notable strengths. Behaviour logs, and those relating to the use of interventions, show a reduction in incidents of challenging behaviour. Records show that staff are well trained to de-escalate challenging behaviour and have a secure understanding of the triggers for negative behaviour. Because these are well understood, the need for physical intervention is rare.
- The impact of the school's work to raise the attainment of pupils, while also supporting substantial growth in their personal development, helps pupils to make increasingly good progress as they move through the school. There is also a clear and immediate impact in these areas for pupils who have recently joined the school. Staff ensure that pupils sustain this academic and personal development over time. Assessment information shows that pupils thrive in this school and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Senior leaders have identified additional strategies which they use to assess pupils' learning in the new curriculum. This enables changes to their learning to be made quickly and all the needs of each individual child to be catered for. Some of these strategies have only recently been introduced, so the different assessments are not coordinated well enough to ensure all the gaps in pupils' development are identified and met.
- Governors' regular visits to the school ensure that they know staff and pupils well and have a clear understanding of the needs of the pupils. Governors do

not have a detailed knowledge of the range of assessment information they are presented with. As a result, they do not fully understand how leaders are ensuring pupils make progress in a wide range of skills and areas of development.

- The local authority provides effective support for the school. Advisers have brokered appropriate professional development for school leaders and arranged for the moderation of teachers' assessment. They have also encouraged and facilitated greater collaboration with other schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the school's wide range of information on achievement is systematically collated and evaluated together so that leaders respond even more quickly to the emerging needs of pupils
- governors increase their knowledge of leaders' approaches to improving teaching and raising standards.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, a group of pupils, a number of parents, governors and a representative from the local authority. They observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and as they moved around the school. Pupils' work and folders were jointly scrutinised with the deputy headteacher. Recent performance information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised. Inspectors also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which collects parents' views about the school's work.