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Mrs Tracey Smith
Headteacher
Rigby Hall Day Special School
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Rigby Hall Day Special School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 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 the school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Rigby Hall is a welcoming, inclusive school. You, other leaders and governors have made sure that the many strengths noted at the school's last inspection have been sustained. Relationships between staff and pupils are respectful, friendly and supportive. As a result, pupils are happy and make progress in their learning and in their personal and social development. Pupils, from the youngest in the early years through to the oldest in the sixth form, are eager to come to school. They greet members of staff happily as they arrive in their taxis and minibuses in the morning, and in lessons they are keen to learn and try their best.

You and the chair of governors both took up your posts at the start of this academic year. It is clear that you have both brought a renewed energy and sense of purpose to the school's work. The pace of change has increased and the drive for continued improvement is strong. You make sure that the emphasis on pupils' learning and academic progress is just as great as that on supporting their personal and social development. The governing body has taken effective steps to become more closely involved and better informed about the school's work, in order to play a stronger part in shaping the school's strategic direction.

You are working closely with governors and other senior leaders to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to school improvement. Your self-evaluation and the plan for improvement are honest and do not hold back from stating aspects that require attention. This has made sure that staff at all levels know what the school is aiming for. However, your current plan for improvement is very wide ranging and not sharply prioritised. You, other leaders and governors are well aware of this and understand the need for the next plan to be more precisely focused on the most important things that need to be done in order to continue to improve the school's effectiveness.

The changes you have made have been welcomed by members of staff. In their responses to the questionnaire, staff said that they were proud to work at Rigby Hall and that they felt the school's effectiveness was better than at the time of the last inspection. In their written comments, one member of staff stated that 'the new head has purpose and direction', and another wrote, 'the changes taking place are making a real difference to pupils' learning'.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been dealt with successfully. The leadership of mathematics is as effective as that of other subjects. As a result there are no substantial differences in the progress pupils make between subjects. Where appropriate, pupils have written targets in their books. Targets are also displayed on boards in classrooms, expressed in terms that pupils can understand.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, the designated lead person for safeguarding, staff and governors are highly aware of the need to keep pupils safe and protect them. The school's culture is one where safeguarding is at the forefront of everyone's minds. You and the staff fully understand the particular issues that may affect pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You, leaders and governors have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are carefully kept.

The safeguarding policy is detailed and thorough. It is a lengthy document, and so you make sure that there is a regular programme of training for all staff to supplement their reading of it. You provide training for all staff even more frequently than is recommended, and keep staff up to date with any changes. This makes sure that staff know what to look for and how to report concerns. Recent training has included important issues such as child sexual exploitation and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Staff know individual pupils and their circumstances well, and are quick to spot any changes in behaviour or demeanour that might indicate something is amiss. You do not hesitate to take action where necessary, including making referrals to the local authority or contacting the police.

The site is safe and secure. Pupils' arrival and departure by taxi and minibus is carefully supervised. You make the appropriate checks to ensure that staff are

recruited with pupils' safety in mind and that they, and visitors, are suitable to be with children and young people. The governing body regularly checks the school's arrangements for safeguarding and reviews how cases are handled.

You make sure to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including through the programme for personal and social education and the provision of sex and relationships education for pupils of secondary age. Pupils, parents and staff raised no concerns about pupils' safety and welfare.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed three lines of enquiry. We decided to focus on: provision in the sixth form and whether it offers appropriate challenge and progression, the extent to which pupils make good progress in other key stages across the school, and the impact of the school's efforts to maintain good rates of attendance.
- The main aim of the sixth form provision is to make sure that students are suitably prepared for their next steps at college or in the world of work when they leave Rigby Hall. Staff strike a good balance between supporting students in their personal and social development and boosting their academic achievements. Students are taught a range of skills that will help them in the workplace and at college. For example, they are taught how to travel independently and how to shop for provisions by themselves. Students are also encouraged to make a positive contribution in the local community and to challenge themselves through their involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. As well as attending college for one day a week, students spend a day at a work experience placement. The work experience they undertake is relevant to the students' interests and aspirations. All placements are carefully checked to make sure they are suitable and safe. Many of the students are studying subjects such as mathematics and English at a higher level than they achieved at the end of Year 11. Where appropriate, some are studying for GCSEs. The pupils are making further progress and deepening their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are studying.
- The numbers on roll in the sixth form have grown since the school was last inspected. The accommodation is rather cramped for the number of students who use it. As numbers are not anticipated to fall in future and may rise, you and the members of the governing body, together with the local authority, have to consider options for the future and make the necessary plans.
- You and other senior leaders have supported staff to make sure that what pupils know and can do in reading, writing, speaking, listening and mathematics are accurately assessed, in order to track their progress from these starting points. You have set challenging targets for the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make over the course of a year. This has had a positive impact, because it has challenged teachers and as a result has raised their expectations of what their pupils should achieve. You have made it clear that there should be no ceiling on pupils' achievement. Pupils' attainment is regularly assessed and progress plotted. Where a pupil makes rapid progress towards their target, the

target is revised upwards. You have plans to devise personalised targets for those pupils who have complex needs or whose starting points are very low.

- Your assessment information shows that pupils in all key stages typically made good progress from their starting points over the course of the last academic year. Work in pupils' books and your current assessments confirm that this is being maintained. Teachers discuss the progress of individual pupils with you, in order to decide whether or not interventions may be needed to make sure they continue to move forward.
- You and other leaders expressed some reservations about the assessment system that you currently use. You are devising your own spreadsheets to supplement the information, because you know that now is not the time for a major change. You, leaders and governors understand fully that the school's assessments must be informed by your curriculum, and that teaching should not focus only on what is to be assessed.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their personal skills and attributes. Staff make sure not to do things for the pupils that they are capable of doing for themselves. For example, in the dining hall, pupils of all ages are expected to be independent and make choices, engage sociably with others and clear away after themselves.
- Last year, the school's overall attendance figure was in line with the national figure for all schools. The attendance of children who are looked after was higher than this and above the figure for all pupils nationally of secondary age. Your current attendance figures are a little lower than last year's, but are rising. The school's roll is increasing and you have admitted a number of pupils who needed some time to settle in.
- Most of the pupils whose attendance falls below 90% have particular medical or other needs. You make sure that attendance is carefully monitored and any unexplained absence is quickly followed up. You work closely with families where there are concerns that attendance may be slipping. This typically has a positive impact and sometimes makes a marked difference. One pupil recently started at Rigby Hall with a history of not attending school at all. His attendance rate has risen rapidly to 85%.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work closely with the local authority to plan strategically for the future development of sixth form provision
- future plans for improvement are more sharply prioritised to reflect the most important things that need to be done
- they evaluate carefully the strengths and weaknesses of the system for assessing pupils' learning and progress and make changes only when clearly necessary.

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

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you and two assistant headteachers to talk about the school's self-evaluation and current priorities and to agree the key lines of enquiry for this inspection. We also looked at and discussed information about pupils' attainment and progress. I talked about attendance and the school's approach to safeguarding with the designated lead person for these aspects of the school's work. I also met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors.

We made short visits to classes in all key stages from the early years to the sixth form. We observed teaching and learning, spoke informally with pupils about their work and looked at their books. I spent time in the dining hall. I scrutinised the school's record of recruitment and vetting checks and other documents relating to safeguarding. We looked at the range of displays in corridors and around the school. I examined documents, including the school's plan for improvement and assessment information. I looked at documents published on the school's website. We took account of the 17 responses made by parents on the Parent View website, and of the views of 28 pupils and 39 members of staff who completed online questionnaires.