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Mrs Julie Fardell
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fardell

Short inspection of Victoria School

Following my visit to the school on 29 March 2017 with Kim Ellis and Robert Roalfe, Ofsted inspectors, 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 outstanding in October 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Leaders and governors have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have high aspirations of themselves, staff and pupils and, over time, they have taken action to make improvements in this child-centred school.

The current leadership team is relatively new, but since you joined the school in January 2017, you have formed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Ably supported by the head of school, other leaders, the governing body and a dedicated staff team you have built on outstanding practice and inspired staff to take action to further improve the quality of education provided by the school.

Leadership at all levels is strong. Staff value the training that they are given. The process of managing the performance of all staff is most effective. This has helped to maintain the high standards that were found at the time of the last inspection.

Pupils benefit from outstanding teaching which allows them to make rapid progress across the curriculum. Teaching is effective because staff plan carefully to meet the needs of individual pupils. Staff have strong subject knowledge and work well together to move learning on at an appropriate pace. Teachers use resources and activities to stimulate pupils' interest and challenge the most able pupils to make rapid progress.

All staff help pupils to improve their communication. They model good use of spoken English and use signing and symbols well. Pupils of all abilities are encouraged to make their views known. Learning often has a purpose beyond the classroom. For example, pupils are taught to use kitchen equipment safely and their confidence in using numbers is developed through solving mathematical problems while taking part in activities such as tenpin bowling. Tasks such as this help to promote high levels of enthusiasm for participation and a commitment to learning.

However, not all teaching in the school matches the exceptional quality of the best. Occasionally weaker planning results in less effective teaching. Leaders have identified the need for further training and support to put this right.

Leaders have effectively addressed the area for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Victoria College, a provision for learners aged over 19 who have profound and multiple learning disabilities, was added to the campus after the last inspection. This has helped leaders develop a more cohesive 14 to 19 offer on the school site. A variety of resources and activities are now used to promote effective learning in improved accommodation for older learners in the school. However, leaders acknowledge that the range of accreditation and the curriculum offer for secondary aged pupils needs to be developed further.

Pupils thrive in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. They are happy and feel listened to. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with each other and staff. They are courteous and collaborate well with others in lessons and during social time. Positive behaviour is actively promoted by staff and effective and consistent action is taken to manage the behaviour of those who find it more difficult to behave well. Pupils believe that that are treated fairly. Sanctions are used appropriately but infrequently and there have been no exclusions since before the last inspection.

Parents are extremely supportive of the school. Almost all parents whose views were shared with inspectors would recommend the school. Communication between staff and parents is regular and of a high quality. A very large majority of parents strongly agree that their child is well taught and makes good progress at the school. Parents believe that leadership and management is of a high quality and that staff make sure that pupils are well behaved.

Governance is strong. Governors are committed to ensuring that the school continues to provide an outstanding quality of education for the pupils and they possess the skills, knowledge and understanding to hold leaders to close account. They offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders and they know what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. Governors have played a significant role in maintaining the very high standards in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities with regard to keeping pupils safe. As they

have received up-to-date training and regular updates, staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare.

Referrals are made promptly and outside agencies are used appropriately. Record-keeping is thorough and careful checks are made on visitors and staff. Pupils are taught to stay safe in a range of situations. For example, they learn about online safety, road safety, healthy relationships and how to stay safe at home.

As a result of a strong safeguarding culture, all pupils, staff and parents whose views were shared with inspectors indicated that pupils feel safe as they are taught to stay safe in an effective way. No concerns about bullying were raised during the inspection and pupils are certain that staff would deal quickly and effectively with any unpleasantness, if it took place.

Inspection findings

- All groups of pupils make rapid progress from their starting points throughout the school. Progress is tracked well and the detailed and accurate information that is collected is used to inform effective interventions when required. Individual pupils have achieved consistently well but, as leaders are aware, opportunities for wider accreditation are not established for all secondary-aged pupils. In particular, the 14 to 19 curriculum and qualifications for the most able are not fully developed.
- Pupils are well supported to gain essential life skills. Independence is promoted appropriately and older pupils benefit from worthwhile work experience. Pupils are effectively prepared for the next stage of their lives and almost all of those who have left the school have moved on to sustainable education and training since the last inspection.
- Assessment is accurate as information is checked in school, across the federation and externally. It is used well by the vast majority of staff to inform their planning but a few staff do not use it to carefully inform targets for individual pupils.
- The school is a vibrant learning environment. High-quality displays celebrate pupils' achievements and aid their learning. Homework is used well to promote family learning, consolidate what has taken place in the classroom, develop skills and deepen understanding. Parents believe that appropriate homework is set and pupils told inspectors that they enjoy doing the homework that they are given.
- Teaching is usually of the highest quality in the school. Teachers, teaching assistants and other adults generally work extremely well together to help pupils to develop their skills, including in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. Occasionally, though, planning is not considered carefully enough. Consequently, teaching assistants are slower to move learning on and activities do not accelerate the progress of those who find learning the most challenging in mixed-ability groups. This means that the progress that pupils make is not as rapid as elsewhere in the school.
- Children make an excellent start to their schooling within the early years setting. In common with other areas of the school, staff know the children well, teaching

is of a very high quality, staff focus upon helping children make rapid progress and communication with parents is excellent. The early years provision is very well led and managed.

- Additional funding is used well in the school. For example, sports funding has been used to extend the range of activities that pupils can participate in, catch-up funding has been used effectively to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and pupil premium money has helped to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others in the school.
- Effective action has been taken to improve the attendance of individuals and support pupils who are absent for medical reasons. The family support worker engages positively with pupils and their parents to help those who are unable to attend regularly. When attendance is analysed without those who are absent for legitimate medical reasons, the school's overall attendance is similar to that of mainstream settings.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the 14 to 19 curriculum and qualifications are extended for the most able pupils and accreditation opportunities for all secondary-aged pupils are widened
- all teaching matches that of the best that is evident in the school by ensuring that all staff use the assessment information that is available to them to plan to help pupils to make rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, the head of school, other leaders, staff, seven governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the Birmingham Education Partnership. The lead inspector also spoke to a consultant who works with the school by telephone.

Inspectors made short visits to 20 lessons with senior leaders and looked at pupils' files and books. We talked to pupils informally and formally and spoke to parents

during the day. Inspectors considered 22 responses and 16 free text comments on Parent View. We also looked at a summary of a recent school questionnaire, with the same questions as those found on Parent View, and 40 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, information about managing teachers' performance and staff training records. Minutes of meetings of the governing body and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety were also analysed. Inspectors looked at published information on the school's website.