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21 May 2018

Mrs Sarah Godden
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Dear Mrs Godden

Short inspection of Oldbury Wells School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 2018 with Tracey Lord, 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 good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has become an academy and is the founder member of the Bridgnorth Area Schools' Trust. Leaders, including governors, are relentlessly focused on ensuring that all pupils receive a high-quality education. You have placed meeting the needs of individual pupils at the centre of the school's work. As a result, you have created an inclusive, caring and friendly community. Pupils enjoy school, feel very safe and appreciate the support they receive.

You have a strong understanding of how well the school is doing and what needs to improve further. You are using your experience and the good capacity of leaders further to improve the good quality of education in the school. You have ensured that the school's improvement plan is detailed and addresses the areas for improvement you have identified. Leaders make regular checks on progress against the improvement plan. As a result, you have created a strong culture of continuous improvement. Further, you have ensured that staff and governors understand the improvement strategies, resulting in a strong team approach. Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of your priorities.

You have carefully considered the way you share good practice across the school. For example, individual faculty reviews help evaluate and spread mutual expertise. School monitoring records show that these initiatives have helped consistently improve teaching and progress.

The previous inspection report directed the school to eliminate the small proportion of teaching that required improvement. In addition, leaders were asked to ensure that pupil achievement was good across the curriculum. Since the last inspection, leaders in the school have addressed both of these areas effectively so that neither now remain an area for improvement. For example, teaching is now judged by you to be outstanding or good across all subject areas as a result of rigorous monitoring and effective staff development. Since the previous inspection, pupil attainment has continued to improve and is now at least good across the curriculum. You recognise that further work is required to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

You and your team are ensuring that the good behaviour of pupils and effective sixth-form provision, all noted in the previous inspection report, are maintained. These features remain of high quality in the school and have continued to improve since the last inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and meet all statutory requirements. School records show that when staff have had cause to act they have done so in a proportionate and timely manner. You have ensured that staff receive regular high-quality training so that they are aware of the risks pupils face and follow procedures when they have concerns. As a result, you have created a culture where staff are vigilant and well versed in their responsibility to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Parents and carers express high levels of confidence in the school's work to keep everyone safe.

Pupils are confident that there is an adult to talk to if they have a worry or concern. They were confident that any issues such as bullying would be dealt with effectively. All pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe and well cared for.

You have ensured that safeguarding issues are carefully threaded through the curriculum via assemblies, form time and subjects. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including how to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- You have taken effective action to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. For example, leaders have introduced systems to ensure that staff know the barriers to learning faced by individual pupils and how teachers can best plan to meet pupils' needs. Leaders, including governors, regularly check that these strategies are having an impact on the progress of pupils. As a result, current information provided by school leaders and work in pupils' books indicate that the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is improving across all year groups. Pupils spoke positively to inspectors about the support they receive and how it is helping them to improve.

- During the inspection, inspectors saw clear evidence of teachers planning effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils were engaged in lessons. For example, in a Year 11 geography lesson, the teacher's highly effective planning met the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils were motivated and engaged in their learning.
- The curriculum across all key stages offers a broad and balanced experience for pupils. It includes an excellent range of academic and vocational courses. Pupils speak highly of the opportunities they receive. One pupil commented that, 'There is something for everyone at this school.' Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum that focuses on pupils' interests and future ambitions. As a result, the overwhelming majority of pupils leave Oldbury Wells very well prepared for their next steps.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is well planned so that pupils' knowledge and understanding are developed from Year 7 through to their GCSE courses. For example, in humanities, teachers are very clear about what pupils need to know in every lesson, over all five years of the secondary curriculum. This enables leaders to monitor the progress of classes and identify where groups are falling behind in the coverage of course content. As a result, pupils are making very strong progress in history and geography.
- Attendance is high for most groups of pupils and has been improving steadily over the past three years. In 2017, the attendance of pupils was above the national average. Leaders shared with inspectors examples of pupils who were attending school more regularly as a result of carefully planned interventions. Nonetheless, approaches to reduce disadvantaged pupils' absence have been less successful. Leaders, including governors, recognise there is further work required to improve their attendance. Leaders have recently introduced new strategies for improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils that include regular contact with pupils' families. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this work.
- Through accurate self-evaluation, you had identified improving the achievement of the most able pupils as a priority for improvement. You introduced new whole-school strategies to improve the progress and attainment of this group further. Consequently, almost all teaching, including in the sixth form, is effective in meeting the needs of the most able pupils. For example, in a Year 8 history lesson, pupils worked in groups to analyse a historical source. Most-able pupils were directed to feed back to the rest of the class on behalf of their groups. As a result, pupils were challenged to summarise the views of their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improved by more frequent evaluation of the impact of strategies used to support the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- the strong practice routinely seen in most subject areas to challenge the most able pupils is consistently used by all teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's effectiveness. I also met with the chair of the local governing body, a member of the board of trustees and the chair of the board of trustees. Inspectors visited a range of lessons in all key stages. We met formally with groups of pupils and we spoke informally to them throughout the day. Inspectors examined documents, including information about the safeguarding of pupils, the school's self-evaluation, the development plan and information about pupils' achievements. Inspectors considered 62 responses completed this year to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 57 additional written responses. Inspectors also reviewed 71 responses to the staff questionnaire and 49 responses to the pupil questionnaire.