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Miss Charlotte Stubbs
Headteacher
Uffculme School
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Dear Miss Stubbs

Short inspection of Uffculme School

Following my visit to the school on 09 October 2018 with Andrea Quigley and Kim Ellis, 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 January 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

The school has gone through a number of major changes. At the last inspection there were 134 pupils from early years to Year 11 in one building. Now the school accommodates 200 pupils from early years to post-16 in three separate buildings. There has also been an increase in the range of special educational needs that pupils need support with. There has been an increase in staffing to match these changes. Leaders have addressed the area for improvement from the previous inspection and taken steps to extend the range of opportunities for pupils in key stages 3 and 4.

Since your appointment in September 2018 you have promoted a clear vision of where the school needs to develop to ensure that all areas are again outstanding. You lead by example, demonstrating your absolute determination that the school will be the very best it can be for all pupils to succeed. You recognise the strengths of the school and where the school needs to improve. You have a robust plan in place to address the priorities you have already identified. Governors are currently investigating the options for collaborative working with a number of other special schools.

Teachers and teaching assistants work together very well to move learning on in lessons. In the best lessons they use resources and activities skilfully to provide

interest and appropriate challenge for pupils. This teaching helps pupils make good progress in a range of subjects. Staff say that they are proud to work at Uffculme. They have excellent relationships with pupils and understand their pupils' individual needs well.

In every building of the school there is a calm, orderly and purposeful learning environment. In lessons and at less structured times, such as breaktime and lunchtime, pupils are polite and show respect for each other. They are positive about school and the support they receive from the adults working with them. Pupils were happy to share their work with us and displayed pride in their achievements. Attendance at school is very good.

The majority of parents who completed questionnaires and those who spoke to inspectors at the start of the day were positive about the work of the school. They appreciate the difference it is making to the lives of their children. A typical comment was 'It is a positive, safe and structured environment with very hard working and caring staff.' There were some suggestions that communication with parents and support for pupils' sensory issues could be better.

Both you and governors recognise that the combination of the recent changes and the lack of a substantive headteacher in past last year, meant that the school did not continue to build on its outstanding practice in all areas. This can be seen in a lack of consistency of approach across the whole school. Sometimes this means not enough work has been done to make sure every pupil is learning what is most appropriate to their individual needs and interests.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and there is a strong safeguarding culture at Uffculme. In recognition of the additional needs and vulnerabilities of your pupils, you ensure that protecting pupils and keeping them safe is a key priority for everyone.
- Safeguarding training is regularly provided for all staff and is backed up by weekly safeguarding briefings. As a result, all staff are confident about what to do and whom to contact when they have any concerns. Appropriate procedures are in place for staff to register all concerns and senior leaders follow these up immediately. There are clear protocols for dealing with pupils who are absent from school. Senior leaders are tenacious in escalating serious concerns and ensuring that they are seen through to the best possible conclusions for pupils and families. They are eloquent in their passion for doing the very best for their pupils. Records of individual cases are detailed and thorough.
- Staff throughout the school teach pupils about the potential risks and dangers they might face. As a result, you keep pupil safe in school, and when they are online or on school visits. Pupils said that they feel safe and well looked after at school. They are confident they can bring concerns to staff, who will sort everything out for them.

Inspection findings

- We followed a number of lines of enquiry to check the quality of education provided by the school. This inspection focused on the impact of leader's actions, particularly the effectiveness of the curriculum at meeting pupils' needs. We also looked at how leaders use assessment information to ensure that pupils make progress across the curriculum. Lastly, we considered how well the school supports pupils when they have problems or need extra support.
- Work to prepare pupils for the next stages of their learning starts from an early age and continues through the school. Transitions between the different age groups of the school are handled sensitively. Students are prepared for life after Uffculme through opportunities to take part in mini-enterprises and work at the local college.
- School leaders and teachers ensure that they have a detailed and accurate profile of the abilities and needs of all pupils who join the school. Teachers set challenging and ambitious targets in core subjects for pupils and the majority of pupils achieve, and even exceed, them. There is clear tracking of pupil's progress in these subjects, and pupils are quickly offered extra support if they are falling behind their peers. Targets from education, health and care plans are incorporated into personal targets and progress is recorded against these. However, when we talked to pupils they were not aware of their own targets and older pupils were not clear about where they could find them.
- In the majority of lessons, pupils were fully engaged in activities that were appropriately matched to their level of understanding. In all areas of the school there is a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education, which gives pupils lots of opportunities to learn about their place in the world. Occasionally for the older pupils, their work in lessons and in their books was focused too much on meeting syllabus requirements and not on their specific developmental needs.
- School staff identify pupils' vulnerabilities at an early stage and put interventions and support in place for pupils in danger of getting into trouble. Your pastoral leader provides opportunities for pupils to register concerns through the weekly surgery sessions. She has developed an imaginative and effective variety of strategies for supporting pupils to self-refer and follow individual programmes.
- The school is designated for pupils with autism and communication and language difficulties. Over time, the needs of your pupils have become more complex. You recognise that you will need to develop further the school's approach to supporting these needs. This will ensure that all pupils have the opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge that will help them thrive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they adapt the curriculum and its delivery creatively to meet the changing needs, interests and abilities of all the pupils and students at Uffculme

- they ensure that all pupils and students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to get better

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

Robert Roalfe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

To explore the main lines of enquiry for this inspection, inspectors:

- met with you, senior leaders, the school staff and a group of governors, and spoke to an external advisor for the school from Birmingham Education Partnership
- met with parents at the beginning of the school day to discuss their child's welfare and progress
- spoke with pupils around school and met with a group of pupils to discuss their learning and experience of school
- met with staff formally and informally to discuss the school's progress since the last inspection
- visited 18 lessons across primary, secondary and post-16 phases; visits were made jointly with senior leaders
- scrutinised a range of documents, including: work in pupils' books; teachers' planning files; curriculum folders; the single central record; safeguarding documents; records for attendance, exclusions, behaviour, physical interventions and the monitoring of pupils' progress; and minutes of the governing body meetings
- considered: the views of the 19 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View; the replies of parents to the school's own questionnaire last term; and the 42 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.