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Mrs Sarah Young
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Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of Sidestrand Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2018 with Cindy Impey, HMI, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

A key strength of your leadership is the constant drive to improve. Your resilience, commitment and enthusiasm for wanting the very best for your pupils and staff have enabled you to maintain and improve the good-quality provision. The local authority holds your school in high regard. You provide a haven for pupils who can focus on their learning and develop the essential independent skills needed throughout life. Your self-evaluation is accurate and clearly identifies the school's many strengths. You and your senior leaders work tirelessly to create a strong teaching team with a wealth of talent. You and your staff are always looking to improve the school further and have clear plans for the future.

The vast majority of staff feel well supported and are proud to work at the school. They have high expectations and share your vision to make Sidestrand Hall School the best it can be.

Parents and carers say how pleased they are that their children attend this school and the vast majority would recommend the school to other parents. One parent expressed the views of many, commenting, 'We couldn't be happier with the teaching and the care he receives.' Another parent commented, 'They are a fantastic school and have supported not just our child but us as well through some really tough times and they are still supporting us.'

Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to the school to learn. One pupil said, 'Teachers make the school special,' and others who were listening agreed. Pupils enjoy 'helping people when they need help'. The school council members are proud that they were part of the panel in the recent deputy headteacher interviews. They plan to raise money for high-visibility jackets to identify playground friends.

You have passionate and committed governors who bring a wide range of skills to the strategic leadership of the school. They visit regularly and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They appreciate the commitment of staff and are keen to support you with the school's next steps. Governors have confidence in the recent appointment of a new deputy headteacher, who joins the school in January 2019.

At your previous inspection, the inspectors noted two areas for future development. The first area related to teachers using assessments consistently, to set the correct level of challenge for pupils. This is now a strong aspect of your work. The second area for improvement concerned staff giving pupils the opportunity to complete work for themselves. You have certainly worked hard on this area; pupils have confidence in trying out new concepts for themselves and are willing to ask when unsure of what to do.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Safeguarding has a high priority in the school. Checks on the suitability of adults to work in the school are extremely thorough, as are the checks on visitors.

Child protection records are exceptionally well maintained, and staff are steadfast in their work to ensure that agencies support pupils and their families well. All staff are acutely aware of their responsibility for pupils' safety and welfare. They understand how the school curriculum plays a key role in ensuring that pupils are kept safe from different risks.

Parents receive helpful guidance on how to support their children. Pupils say they feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. Pupils say bullying is rare and that they can approach an adult if they have concerns.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we contemplated whether the curriculum was suitably enhanced by appropriate activities. Pupils at the school enjoy a vast range of activities in all subjects, which simultaneously nurture and challenge pupils in their learning. Lessons are personalised to pupils' individual learning needs. Pupils complete the work themselves, with teachers and teaching assistants providing the necessary support in a timely manner. Staff use their considerable expertise to build pupils' ability to cope with different experiences, to broaden

their understanding of the world around them. Photographs around the school celebrate pupils' success in the work they have accomplished and the excursions they have participated in.

- You and your team work hard to identify pupils' starting points, to provide learning that is accessible and stimulating. Teachers consistently use assessments about what pupils know and can do to set them work at the correct level of challenge to move them on to new learning. Leaders need to fine-tune the school assessment system further to capture the small but significant steps of progress in pupils' learning.
- Leaders and teachers review pupils' progress towards their targets regularly. Pupils who struggle receive extra help quickly. Leaders rigorously monitor the progress pupils make against their education, health and care (EHC) plans at key stages 2 and 3. This needs sharpening at key stages 4 and 5 to ensure whole-school consistency and good practice.
- An area of focus during the inspection was how successful the expansion of the sixth form has been in providing personalised learning for good outcomes and catering for students' next steps. At your previous inspection, you had four students in the sixth form. Since then, you have a newly built sixth-form provision and have seen a significant increase in student numbers, catering for 35 students.
- You and your staff provide a high level of pastoral care, independence and life skills instruction which support and enhance the accredited courses the students undertake. The qualifications on offer need further consideration to ensure that a broader range is available. In 2018, all students secured suitable leaving destinations. Extremely effective partnerships with families and providers ensure that students progress to destinations that are well matched to their needs and interests.
- We considered the impact that pupil premium funding has on disadvantaged pupils' progress. This is because it is not clear on your school website what impact the funding has on pupils' learning and well-being. We found that disadvantaged pupils make good or better progress, in common with other pupils. This is because staff understand where pupils are in their learning and sensitively plan the next steps to support their knowledge and skills development. Leaders and governors are meticulous in ensuring that all funding is used carefully to enable pupils to conquer any barriers they have to their learning.
- We agreed to explore the attendance rates of pupils at the school. This is because rates of attendance are often below the national averages and persistent absence is high. It is evident that staff do all they can to make sure that pupils attend regularly. However, for some pupils, due to medical reasons, attendance is intermittent. Close examination of the school's records of attendance revealed that pupils do not take time off without good reason.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they expand current good practice to make sure that EHC plan targets are reflected in planning and practice in all key stages
- they further refine the whole-school assessment systems for monitoring pupils' progress to build a more precise picture of pupils' academic achievement
- they further develop the range of qualifications on offer to address the changing needs of the sixth-form students.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, governors and the school council. A telephone conversation was held with a local authority representative. Inspectors visited lessons across all phases to observe pupils in lessons, sampled pupils' work and reviewed information about their progress. The views of staff were evaluated through the 46 responses to Ofsted's online survey. Parents' views were considered through the 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 free-text responses. There were no responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime, and observed pupils arriving and leaving the school. I scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the development plan, governors' minutes and documents relating to safeguarding.