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David Bownds
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Dear Mr Bownds

Short inspection of Loxley Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2018 with Susan Lowry, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher last year, you have worked diligently with your staff to foster a positive and ambitious ethos. The school is a caring and hardworking community in which pupils achieve well. Pupils arrive at the school having encountered significant social, emotional or health difficulties at their previous school. They make good progress from their starting points.

Pupils are supported very well by staff. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Staff are insightful in their understanding of each pupil's needs. They provide thoughtful care and firm challenge tailored to individual pupils' circumstances. Pupils get on very well with each other. As a result, pupils feel happy in school and grow in confidence academically and personally. Many make lasting friendships as a consequence of attending the school.

The atmosphere in the school is calm and friendly. Routines and activities, including during lessons, are usually very well organised and gain the pupils' interest. Care is taken at the start of each day to welcome pupils into the school. Any potential issues, or upset, are detected early and pupils are given ample opportunities to resolve these before they develop into significant problems.

Productive work with parents and carers, including those who need particular support, helps to build bridges between home and school. The school communicates routinely and well with parents and carers, including through effective liaison with a family support worker. This helps to ensure that pupils experience the continuous and

consistent support necessary for successful learning and good personal development. Strong links with external agencies, including the local authority, help to ensure that most pupils have access to relevant specialist services while they are at the school. However, in some instances, for example in relation to therapeutic services, resources are scarce. A few pupils do not thrive once they leave school because they lack resilience, have too few local opportunities in education or training or do not receive enough additional help or support from external agencies.

An effective, and very able, local advisory board of governors provides valuable support and suitable challenge to school leaders. They bring a wealth of experience to the role and this allows them to monitor the performance of the school as well as assist in setting its strategic direction. For example, the board is actively involved in reviewing provision at key stage 4.

Most areas identified as needing improvement at last inspection have been tackled with rigour. However, the school has identified that there is more work to do in ensuring that all work set for pupils challenges them to do as well as they can. The school became an academy in 2015 and is now part of the Manor Hall Multi-Academy Trust. Senior leaders in the school are very well supported by the trust. The school receives useful 'support and challenge' visits as part of a package of support commissioned by the trust.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding in the school is very well led. Effective communication within the school, and between home and school, helps ensure that risks to pupils are identified quickly and acted on. Staff in the school work together well to check on pupils' welfare. They meet regularly to review how well pupils are doing and whether any additional help is required. Staff and governors are well trained in safeguarding matters.

Pupils feel safe when they are in school. They are confident that staff will help them if they get into any difficulty. They are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when they use the internet. Bullying is usually rare. When it does happen, pupils are adamant that staff act upon it quickly.

Senior leaders in the school routinely review any risks facing pupils and take action to protect them from harm. Records are well organised. Checks on staff or adults visiting the school are detailed and thorough. Leaders monitor the welfare of pupils who study at alternative providers very closely. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Behaviour around the school is very good. Pupils are closely supervised, including during free time. Staff involve pupils in a variety of well-organised sporting and social activities when they arrive at the school each day, during break and at lunchtime. Pupils enjoy and value these sessions. They focus well during the various activities and obviously appreciate the efforts of staff. In turn, this helps to maintain the positive and productive relationships that exist in the school.

Inspection findings

- As well as safeguarding, we agreed to consider four other areas of the school's work during the inspection. These were: the outcomes achieved by pupils, including their destinations; the academic targets set for individual pupils and the help they are given by teachers; pupils' attendance levels; and the range of courses studied at key stage 4, including GCSE.
- Pupils make good progress during their time at school. They usually join the school having experienced serious difficulties in their earlier education. In nearly all cases, pupils need considerable help with reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have made this a priority and it is reflected in routine classroom activities.
- In general, pupils' work rate in lessons increases as they settle into the school and build effective relationships with teachers and other staff. In the great majority of instances, pupils' progress improves each year. By the end of Year 9, some pupils achieve level 1 functional qualifications in English and mathematics. By the end of Year 11, most pupils achieve level 2 vocational qualifications. A few pupils achieve passes in GCSE subjects.
- In recent years, a small number of pupils have not been as successful as they should be in continuing their education or training after they leave school. In part, this is because there are few opportunities available locally and because there is scant support available to them once they leave school. Although pupils in Year 10 and 11 receive help and advice about what to do after they leave school, a few pupils would benefit from more intensive careers advice and support, including when they are in key stage 3, so that they are better prepared for the challenges they will face after school.
- Pupils are usually set challenging targets, academically and personally, when they arrive at school. These targets draw on prior attainment information and in-house assessment. Each pupil's progress is reviewed regularly by senior leaders and, where necessary, additional interventions are agreed with subject teachers and other staff.
- Teachers and other staff in the school are very clear that pupils need to do well academically at school. They work effectively to manage the pupils' behaviour but say they are 'teachers first and carers second'. During the inspection, more than one member of staff commented that the focus in the school since the last inspection has altered from 'we must improve pupils' behaviour' to 'we must improve pupils' learning'.
- In the most successful teaching, staff set high expectations, have good subject knowledge, handle pupils' behaviour expertly and foster positive attitudes to learning. In a few instances, leaders' expectations of teaching are not being translated routinely into routine classroom practice. For example, not all key stage 3 teachers insist on high enough standards of writing. At key stage 4, some work set for the higher-attaining pupils is too easy.
- Staff work together very effectively to monitor and improve attendance. Most pupils had poor levels of attendance at their previous school. However, attendance usually improves, often markedly, after pupils start at this school. Each pupil has an individual attendance target and any non-attendance is chased up rigorously with parents and carers. Overall, pupils' attendance levels are broadly in line with schools

of this kind.

- Pupils are taught a wide range of subjects from the national curriculum at key stage 3 but with a particular focus on English and mathematics. Where required, the curriculum is tailored to meet individual needs. At key stage 4, pupils study for an Aim vocational award and can choose from a diverse range of City and Guilds and BTEC qualifications, including construction, motor vehicle engineering, graphics, hairdressing, engineering and animal care. A few pupils achieve GCSE qualifications. All pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 are based at the Armitage site and receive some, or all, of their education at alternative provision, which is monitored carefully by school leaders.
- Pupils have ample opportunities to learn outside the classroom. They take part in sporting competitions, walking and climbing expeditions, fishing, snooker, mountain biking and bush craft sessions. These activities build confidence in pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- existing best practice in teaching is spread more widely so that better standards in writing are achieved at key stage 3 and that all work at key stage 4 is challenging for all pupils
- more intensive careers advice and support is provided for pupils who require it, including at an earlier age, so that they are well prepared for and can access any opportunities available to them after they leave school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board, the chief executive officer of the multi academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Cladingbowl
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning across all sites. We spoke with pupils during lessons and at other times. We observed pupils' conduct around the school sites. We scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work in folders and books. We looked at key documents, including performance information, attendance records, behaviour records, risk assessments and safeguarding records. We spoke with a large proportion of staff. We met with members of the local advisory board, including the chair, and spoke with the chief executive of the trust. We considered two written responses to Parent View, the online parental questionnaire, 13 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 15 responses to the staff questionnaire.