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Mr K Morgan

Sandwell Community School
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Dear Kevin Morgan

Short inspection of Sandwell Community School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 2018 with Johanne Clifton, 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 the school was judged to be good in June 2014

This school continues to be good.

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

In a relatively short period of time you, your strong and active governors and your leadership team have carefully managed a process of change and created one school identity by embedding a shared ethos of aspiration across all campuses. The unique purpose of each campus contributes to improving access to education and learning opportunities for pupils who have previously had challenging educational experiences. Your decisive and inspiring leadership has been central to the success of this course of action.

You, together with governors and other senior leaders, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, you know that progress in mathematics has not improved as swiftly as progress in English. Prioritised action planning has ensured that the changes implemented have been methodical and swift. Not all changes were welcomed by staff. However, once in place, staff acknowledged their success in terms of improvements in pupil behaviour and engagement in learning. There is a comprehensive programme of professional development in place which has supported the new way of working at the school. Leaders want to ensure that the staff have the right skills to ensure that the pupils make the best progress possible.

The values you have focused on through your CREATE system (Cooperation, Respect, Effort, Attendance and Excellence in everything) has provided a focus for

academic learning, well-being, social development and rewards. The system has provided opportunities for staff and pupils to focus on behaviours that need to change in order for learning to be more effective and progress to be celebrated. Staff recognise that the focus on these values has created a calm and friendly place where pupils learn both socially and academically.

Leaders have developed a curriculum that uniquely meets the needs of these pupils and a system to monitor progress and set challenging academic targets. The restructuring of the campuses has enabled staff skills to be more accurately matched to pupils' needs. This has enabled more pupils to return to their mainstream schools. Additionally, those pupils that complete key stage 4 at Sandwell Community School achieve more qualifications than in previous years. Nevertheless, too many leavers still do not continue in education, employment or training.

Pupil's aspirations are raised by teachers. They break down learning into small steps and provide pupils with encouragement to achieve. There is a focus on academic progress through the clearly defined bronze, silver, gold and platinum pathways. The CREATE system has provided a focus on the social skills required to make progress. Leaders have implemented a system of checking pupils' attainment when pupils start at the school, setting academic targets and giving feedback that all contribute to improved progress. Senior leaders use lesson observations and work scrutiny to check pupils' progress carefully. Information gained from these activities is used to inform future professional development and support for staff. This means that staff skills are improved and as a result pupils are challenged more and make better progress.

Throughout the inspection pupils were consistently calm around school and in lessons. They focused on their work and actively engaged in learning. Inspectors observed really positive relationships between pupils and staff. When pupils showed signs of making the wrong choices, staff supported them to make the right decision using effective techniques. When pupils do make the wrong choices, staff are skilled at supporting them and use reflection time and a restorative approach to help the pupil put things right and make the right choices in the future.

Since the last inspection more pupils attend school regularly. However, attendance rates are still too low. Leaders have plans in place to secure further improvement to attendance.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's arrangements to safeguard and support the well-being of pupils are clear and effective. The designated safeguarding lead demonstrates a detailed knowledge of pupils and fully understands their own role and uses this to support staff in school. As a result of thorough and frequent staff training, staff are able to identify risks and safeguarding issues that are relevant to the needs of their pupils, including knife crime, 'Prevent' and county lines.

Staff are confident in using the school's systems and procedures to report concerns. All incidents are recorded carefully and followed up rigorously with the appropriate agencies if required. As a result, vulnerable pupils and their families are given the support and advice they need quickly. Safeguarding records are of a good quality and are securely stored.

Inspectors spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection. Pupils were able to tell inspectors how the school helped them to keep themselves safe. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school and that staff support and help them.

The designated safeguarding lead and other leaders at the school have created effective partnerships with the local authority and organisations such as the police and Sandwell Youth Offending Service to provide appropriate support for individual pupils and to pursue a preventative approach to safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have created a number of data tracking systems to track all aspects of pupils' progress. Judgements about pupils' progress made are moderated internally and externally. Inspection evidence further confirms that the school's progress information is accurate. The data provided by the school systems is used intelligently to provide interventions and bespoke learning plans to improve progress and attendance. While the tracking systems are not fully embedded the early indications are that pupils' progress for all groups is improving.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively. As a result, the vast majority of disadvantaged pupils make the same, and often better, progress than other pupils.
- The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of different cohorts and individual pupils. Learning in the classroom is supported well by a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including football league, chess club, computer club and visits. The CREATE project-based learning is used effectively to help pupils fill gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills and help them to prepare for life in modern Britain.
- Progression in mathematics has improved since the last inspection but leaders have identified that the rate of progress is not as good as that in stronger subject areas such as English. Leaders are aware that some pupils need to be set more challenging work, particularly in mathematics, and they are supporting staff to ensure that this happens.
- Pupils told inspectors that they enjoyed the school more than their previous setting because they felt safe and supported here. Pupils are assessed against key risk factors and as a result a bespoke wide-ranging safeguarding, personal, social and health education programme is effectively delivered using internal and external providers. An example of this was delivering workshops to pupils at risk

of knife crime, so they better understood the risks and could provide emergency first aid if they were injured.

- Many pupils start at the school having had very high absence rates in their previous settings. However, as a result of effective strategies to re-engage them in education, the vast majority improve their attendance. There are now rigorous systems in place to monitor attendance and punctuality. These are used to celebrate good attendance and target improvements where required. The system has enabled you to drill down and identify the barriers that individual and groups of pupils face in attending school. An example of this is where you identified that specific travel routes into school made pupils feel unsafe, and with governors a plan is being implemented to use minibuses to collect pupils from key locations across the borough. Using data intelligently, you have linked barriers to attendance for some groups of learners to their academic and well-being needs and adapted your curriculum appropriately; an example of this is at the COPE campus, which focuses on developing the pupils' confidence through a personal effectiveness curriculum.
- Despite the school's valuable work in this area, attendance is still too low and persistent absence is too high, which means that some pupils miss valuable learning opportunities. Leaders recognise that this is one of the biggest challenges to improving progress and have identified it as a priority.
- The number of pupils who do not continue in education, employment or training (NEET) is higher than the national average. Recent changes to the curriculum are intended to improve attendance and reduce the number of leavers who are NEET.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- data continues to be used effectively and appropriate strategies implemented to further improve attendance
the number of pupils continuing in education, employment or training is increased. Additional support should be provided for pupils at risk of being NEET, ensuring that they receive appropriate impartial careers advice and guidance about future education, employment or training opportunities
- the teaching of mathematics leads to improved rates of progress for all groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Field
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited all campuses. They held meetings with the headteacher, heads of centres, senior leaders, staff, and governors. Inspectors visited lessons with school leaders and looked at pupils' books and files.

Inspectors met with pupils informally and explored their experiences. Pupils' behaviour was observed on arrival to school, in lessons and during social times.

Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documents including the whole-school development plan, the school's self-evaluation and staff training records.

Inspectors scrutinised information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. Inspectors also reviewed the information published on the school's website.