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Mr Keith Youngson
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Dear Mr Youngson

Short inspection of Fox Hollies School and Performing Arts College

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019 with Susan Hickerton, 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 outstanding in September 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.**

Since the last inspection, a new leadership team and governing body have been established. Senior leaders and governors have accurately recognised that the school has a number of important strengths but also some weaknesses. For example, teachers do not use assessment information as well as they could to match work to pupils' capabilities. This means that the most able are not challenged enough and low-ability pupils do not make enough progress in writing.

Despite these weaknesses, the school has many strengths. The school is a warm and welcoming environment and teachers work hard to ensure that pupils' learning experiences are purposeful and engaging. Most pupils make good progress over time because teachers are aware of their individual needs and design appropriate learning programmes for them to follow. Staff are nurturing and have formed good relationships with pupils. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively in lessons and support pupils well in their learning, particularly to improve individuals' personal and social development.

Leaders successfully review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of

most pupils. The broad and balanced curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn; however, more needs to be done to ensure that the writing skills of lower-ability pupils improve quickly, the most able are effectively challenged, and more opportunities are provided for pupils to work independently. Pupils' aesthetic, creative and social development benefits greatly from the strong performing arts provision.

At the last inspection, you were asked to continue to promote effective programmes that support older learners into adulthood, up to the age of 25. Leaders have developed this area well. Further education providers are starting to understand how they can effectively meet learners' additional needs through improving links. The school supports families effectively with transition. Most learners go on to appropriate provision post-19. Families and learners value the support they have from the school, which often continues even when they have left the school.

The governing body is knowledgeable about its main functions and statutory responsibilities. Governors have used a skills audit to accurately identify strengths and areas for further development. They attend relevant training and are developing in their role as critical friend to ensure senior leaders are held accountable for school outcomes. To this end, governors regularly visit the school to gain an insight into how the school operates and to evaluate the quality of education provided. They ask leaders relevant questions to evaluate some of the decisions made. However, sometimes governors are not provided with enough information about pupils' achievement in order to challenge leaders fully, for example in relation to the additional funding the school receives for disadvantaged pupils and its impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

Ensuring that staff and pupils are properly safeguarded permeates all aspects of the school's work. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and safeguarding guidance is implemented effectively. The recently appointed governor is experienced in safeguarding work and this is adding further capacity to leadership in this area. Pupils are safe and secure in school and staff and pupil questionnaire responses agree with the inspectors' view.

Child protection and 'Prevent' duty training for staff is up to date and procedures for the administration of medicine are rigorous. All staff and others who work in the school have been recruited and vetted to confirm their suitability to work with pupils. External reviews of safeguarding help to ensure that policies and procedures remain effective. Leaders are persistent in pursuing outside agencies when their response to referrals is slow or judged not to be in the best interest of the child. Appropriate risk assessments are completed to keep pupils safe from harm during school and off-site activities.

The 'I am safe' curriculum effectively teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, for example when online, and this is further supported by workshops offered to

parents and carers on how to keep their children safe on social networking sites.

Inspection findings

- Except for the most able and lower-ability pupils in writing, most pupils achieve well over time from their low starting points on entry because teaching is effective. Where teaching is less effective, the most able are not given opportunities to work and think independently. This limits their progress.
- Teachers do not use assessment information consistently to identify gaps in learning and provide the appropriate support and intervention. As a result, low-ability pupils do not make enough progress in writing and the most able are insufficiently challenged.
- Disadvantaged pupils attain similarly to other pupils in the school. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils compared with that of other pupils is marginally lower. Overall school attendance is lower than that of schools nationally; however, it compares favourably with that of other special schools.
- Leaders have designed an appropriate curriculum that is suitably adapted to meet the needs of most pupils. This said, provision is not consistently challenging the most able. Appropriate consideration is given to the objectives set out in education, health and care (EHC) plans when organising and providing work for pupils with special needs. Teachers think creatively about different ways to engage pupils and do so successfully, ensuring that activities are worthwhile, stimulating and take account of individual pupils' specific needs.
- Leaders make preparation for adulthood central to their mission. The curriculum supports pupils' personal and social development well through a focus on 'relevant and real' experiences and the mapping and assessing of pupils' personal development. This is a strength of the school.
- The development of pupils' communication is given high priority. Pupils use a range of communication aids, closely matched to their specific needs. Pupils with very limited verbal communication skills are expected to try their best, using visual aids or signing to express themselves clearly. They do this well. The deployment of the speech and language therapy assistant to support pupils in classrooms and to model good practice for adults is having a positive impact on pupils' progress in speaking and listening.
- Behaviour in school, including in the resource provision, is well managed. There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions this academic year. Pupils typically stay engaged with the task in hand and follow adults' instructions. Pupils with behaviour issues are monitored well and are effectively tracked and supported. Behaviour information is recorded effectively, and analysed and evaluated well to inform intervention. De-escalation is successfully used to reduce disruptive behaviour on the few occasions where it occurs. For example, the strategy 'change a face' is used well when pupils are feeling anxious with an adult. Other adults recognise this, and they change places with the adult until the pupil's anxiety levels have reduced.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, particularly the most able, are challenged consistently to make rapid progress, and that lower-ability pupils achieve well in writing
- teachers provide regular opportunities for independent learning to help prepare pupils effectively for the next stage of their education
- leaders refine assessment systems, so that work is properly matched to pupils' capabilities, gaps in learning are identified and the appropriate interventions are put in place to remedy shortcomings in learning.

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

Lesley Yates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with a range of staff, including leaders, to discuss the quality of the school's improvement plan, and check that the single central record and safer recruitment procedures meet government requirements. Inspectors examined a range of documents, including the school's pupil premium strategy and external reviews conducted on the school. They scrutinised the school's current self-evaluation and development plan and evaluated school policies. Inspectors observed teaching and learning with leaders. An inspector met with the student council. An inspector also spoke to a representative from the local authority and a headteacher from a school in the cooperative.

There were no results from the pupil survey and insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to evaluate. Three free-text comments from parents were considered, and 25 responses to the staff survey were considered.