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6 December 2017

Mrs Amanda Mordey  
Principal  
Merstone School  
Windward Way  
Smith's Wood  
Birmingham  
West Midlands  
B36 0UE

Dear Mrs Mordey

### **Short inspection of Merstone School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Sarah Ashley, 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 February 2014.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

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

You, your leadership team and your governors share a powerful common vision for the school. We decided that, during this inspection, we could concentrate on the following aspects of the school's work: attendance; how well pupils in key stage 1 improve their computing skills; and the progress of pupils in key stages 3 and 4.

Senior leaders are dynamic and forward-thinking and leadership at all levels is exceptionally strong. All are inspired by excellent leadership from the top. This ensures that pupils have access to high-quality education and care. Staff training and support complement the dedication that staff show to all pupils.

Outstanding teaching enables pupils to make excellent progress, not just in academic areas, but also in their personal and social development. Lessons stimulate pupils' thinking and staff use a range of communication aids to check learning is at an appropriate pace. Teachers work collaboratively within their key stages to plan effective and stimulating activities to meet the needs of individual pupils. Lessons are practical and fun and draw on pupils' interests.

Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally positive. Staff show

genuine concern and care for all pupils. As a result of this care and compassion, pupils feel valued and confident.

Pupils' behaviour around school is exemplary. They are polite to visitors and show pride in their own achievements and their school. They are respectful to each other and to staff. They said that staff treat them fairly and that any concerns about behaviour are dealt with quickly.

Parents are extremely supportive of school leaders and staff. Almost all parents who shared views with the inspectors were complimentary about the quality of the education and care that their children receive. Parents said they feel assured that their children are safe and well cared for.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong safeguarding culture within school. School leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of a high quality. All staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities towards keeping children safe. Concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The vigilance of all staff protects all children. Referrals for children missing education are made in a timely manner and support from external agencies is sought without hesitation. Pupils and their families are well supported by leaders. Staff and parents reported that they felt confident in the school's ability to support them with any problems that may arise.

Pupils reported that there was no bullying in the school and that any concerns they have are always dealt with by staff.

### **Inspection findings**

- All pupils make excellent progress from their starting points because of first-class teaching that is informed by accurate assessment.
- Governors are committed to supporting the school. They provide a balance of support and challenge and are keen to identify where improvements need to be made. They recognise the need to be fully involved with the safeguarding and protection of pupils. They are enthusiastic about undertaking any additional training as necessary in response to the changing and varied needs of the pupils and their families. Governors have a range of skills that complement those of the school leadership team.
- Lessons for post-16 pupils encourage them to learn much-needed life skills, such as preparing ingredients for a fruit salad or learning how to make a pizza. Pupils across key stages 2 to 4 take part in confidence-building activities, such as performing in a Shakespeare production at a local theatre, when they demonstrated their acting, singing and dancing skills.
- Leaders strive to improve attendance and the strategies they have applied have

worked. Intervention strategies include support for families through the use of family meetings, which involve relevant medical professionals who are able to offer additional advice to parents and school.

- Leaders use pupil premium funding wisely. The offer of a breakfast club, for example, provides pupils with an early morning routine that has promoted good time-keeping and attendance.
- Where poor attendance causes concern, leaders are quick to identify problems and find solutions. During this inspection, we observed excellent practice when staff acted quickly to follow up absenteeism.
- Computing in the early years and key stage 1 is taught across all subjects and ties in closely with pupils' learning of communication skills. In key stage 1, for instance, we found that pupils used technology to create stories about the planets. In one lesson, pupils were learning to program a simple floor turtle by inputting positional and directional commands and they used this to demonstrate their mathematical knowledge. The use of communication switches on doors provides pupils with the opportunity to express their desires and needs to staff, such as selecting the toilet button to inform adults that they need to visit the bathroom. You told me that, to improve teaching further, you are researching a more precise assessment tool to show you how well pupils are doing in gaining the skills that they are being taught.
- Another area of focus has been improving outcomes for pupils in key stages 3 and 4. You and your team have quickly and effectively addressed this through several actions, including the timetabling of additional science lessons each week. Pupils now have two hours of science lessons and these take a more practical hands-on approach, ensuring that all pupils, irrespective of level and ability, are able to participate. In one science lesson, for example, pupils used paint and foil paper to learn about colourful fireworks and the sounds that fireworks make. Physically disabled pupils were ably assisted by support staff who showed care and respect towards them. As a result, pupils were able to paint pictures using three or more colours.
- Leaders have also focused their attention on embedding a new assessment system for academic subjects. You are now developing this tool to include the assessment and tracking of self-help skills and fine and gross motor skills. You have identified that a new focus needs to be 'what do we want pupils to learn and what do they need to be able to do at home?'
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. They are happy to come to school and show respect towards each other and staff members throughout the day. More verbal pupils were enthusiastic in sharing their work with inspectors and keen to demonstrate their acting, singing and dancing skills.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a more appropriate assessment tool for computing is used to allow for pupils' important small steps of progress to be celebrated.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Ellis  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I held discussions with three governors and a representative from the local authority. We also met with middle leaders and discussed curriculum responsibilities and the moderation support that you provide to other schools, both regionally and nationally. The inspection team met with pupils and spoke with parents. We visited every classroom as part of a learning walk and completed lesson observations in eight classrooms.

I took account of four responses on Parent View. I looked at your own analysis of parent questionnaires.

We considered a range of school information, including your self-evaluation and current school improvement plan. We discussed your assessment of pupils' progress across the school and you shared with us evidence of your assessment process. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies, the single central register of checks on staff and a sample of safeguarding files. We looked at attendance and behaviour records.