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Mr Stephen Pritchard Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pritchard Jones

Short inspection of Shepwell School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2019 with Helen Jones 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have achieved this by accurately identifying the priorities for improvement and consistently delivering them. Leaders and governors have a detailed knowledge of the school and through precise self-evaluation have created a sustainable development plan for the continuing success of the school.

Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll and the complexity of their special educational needs and/or disabilities have increased. In addition, you were commissioned by the local authority to open an autism specialist provision. You have embraced these changes and developed your staff team and the curriculum to provide additional mental health support for pupils. This has resulted in a calm learning environment, where pupils feel confident and make progress.

Leaders work with pupils, parents and carers, referring schools and external agencies to develop successful transition induction plans for new pupils. The detailed knowledge and precise level of planning that is undertaken mean that pupils' attendance increases significantly after starting at the school.

The successful review of how home and hospital tuition is delivered has enabled more pupils to access specialist teaching provision and to make good progress. Pupils who access home tuition have over time increased their learning either by physically attending school or by accessing learning via the innovative robot project that the school is piloting.

You and your staff team consistently build positive relationships with pupils that focus on what pupils can do rather than what they cannot do. This develops their confidence, self-esteem and emotional resilience. As a result of this, pupils are able to engage successfully in learning and social activities. The environment that has been created is one where pupils are valued and listened to. There is an active school council and pupils know that they can make suggestions for improvements by using the suggestion boxes or talking to staff. The wide range of experiences available at lunchtimes, including music club, ICT club, study group, football, pool and access to quiet spaces, have been influenced by pupils and are led by skilled staff. This enables pupils to develop further their social and communication skills.

British values are an integral part of school life and all pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey stated that the school encouraged them to respect people from other backgrounds and treat everyone equally. The behaviour of the pupils and their conduct around school are excellent and reflect the values that the school instils in them.

Teachers use their strong knowledge of their subjects and pupils to pitch learning at the most appropriate level and frequently provide opportunities for challenge for the vast majority of pupils. Over time, this means that pupils make good progress and all pupils successfully transition to college or, where appropriate, back to their mainstream school.

Leaders have worked hard to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. This is particularly the case in relation to improving the overall quality of teaching and encouraging pupils to make good progress, and in the effective deployment of other adults in lessons. However, work is ongoing in relation to ensuring that pupils know how to improve their work, particularly in English.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are confident in using the school's systems and procedures to report concerns and are provided with feedback on any concerns they raise. They are trained in line with their role and know how to escalate concerns, if necessary. All incidents are recorded accurately and the safeguarding lead ensures that all incidents are fully followed up and responded to.

The school's arrangements to safeguard and promote the well-being of pupils are clear and highly effective. The curriculum reflects the safeguarding needs of the pupils and the local community and, as a result, pupils know how to keep themselves safe. All pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey stated that the school encouraged them to look after their emotional and mental health. Pupils know how to raise a concern and get support. The designated safeguarding leader demonstrates a detailed knowledge of pupils' welfare needs and fully understands their role and the responsibilities of all staff. It is evident from records and discussions that staff have the necessary expertise and knowledge to keep pupils safe. Child protection records are of a good quality and are securely stored.

Governors are appropriately trained and actively involved in recruitment. They regularly meet with the designated safeguarding lead to quality assure safeguarding procedures and, when making strategic decisions, they always consider any safety and safeguarding implications.

Inspection findings

- Leaders work with referring schools and external agencies to develop a complete understanding of pupils prior to them joining the school. In addition to this, they assess pupils' academic as well as emotional and well-being levels. Using this information, staff are provided with an accurate profile of the pupils' learning needs. Inspectors observed that teachers used this information to set work at an appropriate level that was challenging but did not undermine the pupils' confidence. As a result, they engage in learning and make good progress.
- The calm, supportive learning environment provides pupils with the confidence to engage in learning. All pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey said that their teacher helped them to do their best. This was supported by inspectors' observations of the positive, reinforcing and encouraging language used by staff to provide pupils with the confidence to engage in learning.
- Inspectors observed that, in the majority of lessons, pupils' learning was stretched and challenged more effectively when questioning was used to help pupils' responses and promote thinking at a deeper level. This provided them with opportunities for independent learning.
- Inspectors observed examples of skilled teaching assistants developing pupils' learning, understanding and independence effectively through the use of good questioning and pace. For example, in a science lesson the teaching assistant posed a question, allowed appropriate processing time and, by carefully selecting the next question, gave the pupil confidence to answer the question at a deeper level. This effective use of questioning is reflected in leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning over time and in the good progress pupils are making.
- Teachers plan for and give direction to their teaching assistants. Teaching assistants are involved in departmental meetings and have time to plan with teaching staff. The recent introduction of communication sheets provides clear direction to teaching assistants and, as a result, in the majority of lessons, they have a more positive impact on pupils' learning.
- All groups of pupils make better progress in mathematics and science than in English. Teacher feedback in English is sometimes vague and does not always provide pupils with clear information on how to improve their work. At times, learning in English lacks challenge; pupils develop the necessary skills but are not always provided with opportunities to apply their skills in extended and independent writing.
- Leaders have thorough systems in place that track and monitor attendance. As a result, attendance is good for all groups of pupils. Children who are looked after have a higher level of attendance than other pupils.

- The compassionate approach to pupils and their families is reflected in the planning for improvements in attendance that methodically takes into account pupils' health needs and support required for parents and families. Every available option is used to improve attendance and access to learning, including seeking the support of external agencies, using the legal framework and introducing the innovative robot project that enables pupils to access learning and feel part of the school community. The latter is also enabling pupils to return to school more promptly when their health allows.
- All pupils who responded to Ofsted's survey say the school helps support their well-being and they told inspectors that staff listen to them and that they feel valued. This is one reason why many pupils who previously had poor attendance, or were school refusers, now attend school so regularly and happily.
- The recent commissioning of the autism specialist provision has provided additional challenges for governors, leaders and the staff team. The development of this resource is rightly a key focus of the development plan and the delay in the opening of your new building creates an additional environmental impact. However, the review of your curriculum and the structuring of classes have enabled you to seamlessly integrate these pupils into all aspects of school life.
- Inspectors observed aspects of good autism practice throughout the school. This included task boards, timers, visual schedules, visual prompts, safe spaces and clear language that supported pupils' understanding. However, this good practice is not yet fully embedded, and it is evident that some staff are not fully confident on how they can appropriately support pupils with autism spectrum disorder. At times, this means pupils with autism spectrum disorder do not always know the structure of the lesson and what they need to do next, nor do they always fully understand the questions being asked. Therefore, they do not always have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Leaders are currently developing the staff team to improve this area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to develop staff's understanding of good autism practice by ensuring that:
 - appropriate professional development continues to be provided that enables all staff to consistently use autism-friendly language to reduce ambiguity due to literal interpretation
 - resources to support learning are available and are consistently used by staff to ensure that pupils know the structure of the lesson and what they need to do to complete the work and make progress.
- continue to improve progress and challenge, particularly in English, by:
 - ensuring that all staff consistently provide precise feedback to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work and make progress providing opportunities to develop the skills required to work more independently

- supporting pupils to extend their writing and write more creatively.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Field
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. We visited lessons across the school with you and the senior team and scrutinised a number of pupils' books across a range of subjects. The lead inspector met with a parent during the inspection. Insufficient responses to Parent View were available to provide a valid analysis of parents' views. However, inspectors considered parental survey data provided by the school.

Inspectors considered the 31 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and spoke to pupils informally and formally about their learning, how the school supports them and the breadth of their school experiences.

We met with staff to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection and considered the views of the 21 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspectors scrutinised a number of school documents, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation document. Safeguarding records, policies and procedures, including the checks on staff's suitability to work with children, were considered. Information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance was evaluated.

Inspectors examined learning records for pupils receiving home or hospital tuition.