

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 December 2016

Ms Sabrina Hobbs
Principal
Severndale Specialist Academy
Woodcote Way
Monkmoor
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 5SH

Dear Ms Hobbs

Short inspection of Severndale Specialist Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2016 with Tim Hill HMI and Sarah Ashley, 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since becoming the principal of Severndale Specialist Academy in January 2016, you have worked well with senior leaders, governors and staff to build upon good practice and improve the school further.

Senior leaders have high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils and there is a shared ethos based around the school vision of 'everyone valued, everyone included, everyone learning'. This is an inclusive and aspirational school in which leaders help pupils and staff to realise their potential.

Leaders know the strengths of the school and they have a clear understanding of what they need to develop. However, some of the systems that are now in place are relatively new or recently reshaped so they are yet to achieve their full impact.

Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the predecessor school's inspection. Pupils are now given greater opportunities to participate fully in lessons and complete more work in the time available. Staff often plan activities which build upon prior learning, have a relevance beyond the classroom and use questions well to deepen pupils' understanding. There is some teaching of a very high standard and leaders are taking action to improve teaching

further to help all staff match the quality of the best teaching that can be found in the school.

In response to the findings of the last inspection, access to the outdoor area has been improved for the youngest children. Where it is used most effectively, children are given opportunities to develop their independence skills, make choices and decide for themselves where they want to work and play. However, this is not yet done consistently.

Over time, pupils have made good progress from their starting points throughout the school. Pupils take appropriate tests and examinations and older pupils have achieved a range of accredited qualifications. As a result of excellent transition arrangements, young people move on to purposeful destinations when they leave the school.

Many pupils benefit from taking part in activities with pupils from mainstream schools. Some pupils attend mainstream schools for a few lessons and others have thrived in full-time mainstream education after a suitable period of induction. To the benefit of staff and young people in all settings, the school has close links with Wilfred Owen School, which is on the same site, Mary Webb School, where provision for some secondary-aged pupils is based, and Shrewsbury College, where 'Futures' is situated.

'Futures' is extremely high-quality provision for young people aged 16 to 25. It provides opportunities for learners to take part in meaningful work-related learning and, where appropriate, to gain accredited academic and vocational qualifications. Independence is encouraged; young people run the commercial café and they interact positively with students who attend the college. 'Futures' is a nurturing and purposeful learning environment.

Pupils in all the school's settings are happy and well cared for. They work well together and pupils and staff enjoy positive and productive relationships. Pupils behave well and they are proud of their school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Promoting safety is a core part of the school's culture. Safeguarding procedures are robust across the school, and detailed records are well kept and stored securely. Staff have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and they have received regular and appropriate training. They know what they should do if they have concerns about a child, and referrals are made in a timely manner. School leaders use outside agencies effectively and follow up referrals appropriately. As a result, vulnerable children are well protected.

The school site is secure and pupils feel safe in school. A range of issues related to safety are covered in an age-appropriate way in the curriculum. For example, pupils are taught how to stay safe when they are online. A very large majority of parents who responded to Parent View believe that their children feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- Senior leadership is strong and cohesive and senior staff lead by example. Leadership is having a positive impact at all levels and there is clear capacity to improve the school further.
- Leaders evaluate the strengths and areas for development of the school accurately. They use this information to inform their plans for improvement. Consequently, the areas for development identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed, and systems and structures are in place to improve the school further. However, some of these are not fully embedded and they have not had time to have maximum impact on the quality of education provided by the school.
- Staff work well together and value the opportunities that they are given to help them to improve their practice. Teachers and teaching assistants are supported in developing their skills and want to do the best that they can for the pupils. Staff take opportunities to learn from the best practice, and newly qualified teachers are particularly well supported. The management of teachers' performance is used well to address individual and whole-school priorities.
- Teachers consistently follow school policy in planning learning with long-, medium- and short-term aims. This means that they are covering subject content, developing basic skills and thinking about how lessons will impact on pupils at home, in social situations and in adult life. Staff often look for opportunities to develop pupils' life skills, promote independence and improve their communication skills.
- Staff know the pupils well and most teachers plan learning opportunities to help pupils with different starting points make accelerated progress. This effective planning is supported by strong verbal feedback and comments on work which consistently adhere to the school's marking policy.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to aid pupils' learning. Pupils respond positively to established routines and high expectations and behave well in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to strengthen pupils' understanding of a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, leaders are aware that more opportunities need to be taken to develop communication skills across the curriculum.
- Leaders have correctly identified improving the quality of teaching further as a key area for development within the school. Teaching is often good or better, but leaders want to ensure that teaching is consistently of the highest standard. Strategies that are now in place are leading to improvements, but they are yet to have full impact as they are relatively new.
- Assessment is accurate and information about pupils' progress is reviewed on a regular basis and shared with parents. The system which school staff use shows the small steps that some pupils make, and plans are in place to refine the use of

assessment information in light of national developments.

- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects in all year groups. Pupils in last year's Year 11 gained a range of qualifications, including GCSEs, and post-16 students attained appropriate qualifications in academic and vocational subjects. Overall, older pupils made stronger progress in mathematics than English so leaders now have strategies in place to help pupils to deepen their understanding of abstract concepts in English. However, these are not yet fully embedded.
- Pupils are encouraged to read appropriate texts. They enjoy reading for pleasure and to access information. The most able pupils in the school read with expression, and those who find reading more challenging can use the sounds that letters represent to work out words.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to provide additional activities for disadvantaged pupils. For example, outdoor learning opportunities are being provided and the most able disadvantaged pupils are accessing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Over time, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have matched those of other pupils in the school.
- Sports funding is used well to encourage pupils to be active and to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils benefit from additional swimming equipment, dance lessons and access to a soft play area to develop coordination. School staff have also had additional training to ensure that improvements are sustainable.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and skills, knowledge and understanding, linked to whole-school themes, are built upon across the school. Pupils are taught to make healthy choices, stay safe and behave well. They make good progress in a range of subjects.
- Pupils usually behave well in lessons and around the school. They play happily and considerately during social time and they are polite and confident. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well and incidents of inappropriate behaviour are declining. There have been very few exclusions over time.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They believe that bullying is rare and they are confident that staff would deal with any unkindness if it occurred. Many pupils have excellent attendance, and absence has declined since the time of the predecessor school's inspection.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points. They enjoy relevant learning opportunities and show good levels of concentration within a nurturing environment. The wealth of opportunities for pupils to learn, play, explore and make independent choices in the school building is not yet matched consistently outdoors. The use of the outdoor area has improved since the predecessor school was inspected, but leaders are aware that the use of this provision needs to be developed further.
- Post-16 provision both on the school's main site and at 'Futures' is of a high quality. Students follow academic and vocational courses linked to their interests

and abilities, develop life skills, take part in educational visits and benefit from an appropriate work experience programme. This range of opportunities is effective preparation for the next stage in the young people's lives.

- Transition arrangements are strong. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education or life after Severndale. As advice, guidance and support are of a good quality, young people move on to appropriate destinations over time.
- Parents are full of praise for staff. Most believe that their children are happy, well cared for and safe in the school and a large majority would recommend it to another parent. School staff communicate regularly with parents and act upon parental suggestions to make improvements to the provision in the school.
- Governors have the skills, knowledge and experience to offer appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and attend a range of training opportunities to ensure that they are able to fulfil their duties effectively.
- Leaders are aware that the school's website does not give an accurate reflection of the school. Consequently, plans are in place to launch a new website early in 2017.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- relatively new or revised systems and structures are embedded, evaluated and refined in order to further improve the quality of education provided by the school
- teaching is consistently of the highest standard throughout the school
- children are given regular opportunities to develop their independence skills, make choices and decide for themselves where they want to work and play in the early years outdoor area.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the vice principal, other leaders and members of staff, four governors, including the chair of the governing body, three local headteachers, including a representative of the North Shropshire Teaching School Alliance, and a leader from Shrewsbury College. I also had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer.

Inspectors made short visits to a range of lessons with school leaders, listened to a small number of pupils read and spoke with pupils on a formal and informal basis. I also visited 'Futures', the 16–25 provision situated on the site of Shrewsbury College. The views of parents were considered through 68 responses to Parent View, a letter from a parent and discussions inspectors had with parents at the start of the day.

Documentation, including the most recent information about pupils' progress, leaders' evaluation of the school's performance, records related to behaviour, safety and attendance and the minutes of meetings of the governing body, were also reviewed. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make from their starting points. We also considered aspects of personal development, behaviour and welfare and evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding.