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Mrs Rebecca Garratt  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Garratt

### **Short inspection of Wyre Forest School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 October 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

There has been a powerful drive for improvement at Wyre Forest School. Your strong leadership has provided fresh impetus for change and development. You have successfully brought two staff groups together in the new building and have established a strong team. You have worked tirelessly to build on the school's many strengths. Your leadership and that of other leaders and governors are clear and decisive, and driven by the desire to give the pupils the best.

When I asked people to explain why the school has moved forward quickly, many of them used the words 'consistency' and 'rigour', saying that these attributes underpin the school's approach to all of its work. Everyone knows what is expected of them, and staff invariably follow the school's agreed procedures and methods. As a result, the school's performance has improved markedly since 2013. For example, teachers are wholehearted in their use of the school's systems for observing and recording learning. Pupils' books across all key stages show the same careful and thorough approach to assessing how well pupils have done and highlighting what they should do next.

At the meeting with staff at the start of the inspection, I asked them to sum up the school in one word. Several mentioned 'extraordinary', 'inclusive', 'happy', 'innovative' and 'creative' as descriptions of how they view Wyre Forest School. Their questionnaire responses show that they are proud to work at the school and they know what they, leaders and governors are striving to achieve.

You and other leaders are ambitious and expect a lot from staff and from pupils. Your goal is for all pupils to do as well as they can so that they leave school well prepared for their next steps at college and in the wider world. Your self-evaluation is accurate and based firmly on evidence. Plans for improvement show clearly the direction the school intends to take in the coming year, how current initiatives will embed, and their effectiveness be evaluated.

There is a calm and settled atmosphere across the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are supportive and encouraging. Pupils of all ages get on with their tasks in lessons and enjoy what they are doing. They respond with equal enthusiasm to practical activities such as street dance and cooking and to academic subjects such as mathematics and English. Pupils try hard and persevere with their tasks. They socialise well and make good use of the space outdoors at breaktimes.

Parents and carers who spoke to us and who completed questionnaires were very pleased with all that Wyre Forest School offers. They were highly complimentary about the school, from early years right through to sixth form. Many mentioned how much their children enjoy school – one parent said that her son is so pleased to come that he cheers when he gets to the nursery gates. Others welcomed the fact that staff are approachable and that they listen. They also value the fact that staff know pupils well and care for them. 'His individuality is accepted and celebrated,' said one. Another wrote, 'Despite the challenging behaviours that my son shows, I always know he is safe and well cared for.'

You have dealt successfully with the areas for improvement that were highlighted in the inspection report of 2013. Improvements in the ways that teachers assess how well pupils are learning and decide on the next steps mean that the work pupils are asked to do is carefully matched to their needs and capabilities. The 'observation and learning records' in pupils' books show both staff and pupils what has been achieved and what pupils are working towards. Improvements in the management of pupils' behaviour are detailed in the final section of this letter.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong safeguarding culture at Wyre Forest School. You, other leaders and governors have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The safeguarding team plays a vital part in making sure that pupils are kept safe in school and are taught to keep themselves safe. You all fully understand the need to be especially vigilant, given that pupils' special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities can make them potentially vulnerable. You know individual pupils, families and their circumstances well and understand the context of the local area. You are tenacious in following up issues with the local authority where necessary

and will stand firm and challenge decisions that you do not feel are in a pupil's best interests.

The curriculum includes a comprehensive programme for personal, social, health and economic education, sex and relationships education, and online safety. You emphasise teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe in different circumstances, including when travelling independently. You involve outside agencies such as West Mercia police, who visit to talk to pupils, at a level pitched to pupils' understanding, about pertinent issues such as sexual exploitation.

Parents and staff raised no concerns about pupils' safety. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they feel safe at school and that people help one another to stay safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- Your approach to assessing and recording how well pupils are learning and making progress is effective and serves a number of purposes. It gives a clear picture of how individuals are progressing in different subjects. Day-to-day assessments or 'observation and learning records' summarise each pupil's learning in every lesson and inform the next steps. You work with other schools to check and agree that assessments are accurate. Your online recording system helps you to collate and analyse the information to show the performance of different groups and key stages. Pupils' achievements, next steps and potential barriers to learning are discussed at meetings between leaders and teachers. 'Flightpaths' make clear the challenging expectations for pupils' progress over time from their starting points. As a result, learning is tailored to pupils' needs and they make strong progress across the school.
- Teachers' assessments and the work in pupils' books show that they achieve very well indeed. Across the school, around three quarters of the pupils are on track to reach the challenging targets that have been set for them. The 'learning journey' books in early years are detailed, colourful and informative. Older pupils' books are carefully organised and well presented. Older pupils gain a number of qualifications at a level that matches their capabilities, up to and including GCSE.
- As part of their evaluation of learning in lessons, teachers record the amount of guidance and support that pupils require. Viewed over time, this information charts their progress towards independence. However, it is not pulled together or analysed in a similar way to progress in academic learning. You and other leaders are in the process of developing procedures for assessing the progress pupils make in their personal and social skills, and in the wider curriculum.
- Communication is at the heart of the curriculum at Wyre Forest School. A specialist communication team works alongside staff providing support and guidance. Each pupil has a communication 'passport', which is carefully organised to ensure progression in the development of skills. You use a wide range of methods, tailored to the needs of individuals. You make sure that the classrooms include many visual aids and prompts to support communication. Parents are also taught strategies that they can use with their children at home.

- You enhance the curriculum in a wide variety of ways. There is a strong emphasis on outdoor learning, including at 'forest school' and an allotment, and visits linked to what pupils are learning in class. You provide clubs and activities at lunchtimes, raise funds for charitable causes, celebrate numerous events, and involve parents through activities such as coffee mornings and a Christmas play. Links within the local area are developing well. For example, your sixth-form students work in a community café, serving members of the public. You have received the No Barriers award for this initiative. The sixth-form leader is keen to extend this type of activity for older pupils and to arrange more work placements and experience of 'real-life' settings, in order to further enhance their employability skills.
- Provision for personal, social, health and economic education is particularly strong. You aim to promote confidence, resilience, independence and the ability to make the right decision, in preparation for adulthood. Pupils learn a range of skills that will support them in later life, such as ironing, washing, using public transport and cooking.
- The rigour and consistency of the school's approaches have led to the marked improvements that have been seen in attendance, the substantial reduction in persistent absentees and the reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusions. The figures for Wyre Forest School are now close to the national averages for all schools. The family support worker and other staff make clear the school's expectations for attendance and help families to meet them.
- Staff know and implement the school's systems for managing behaviour, and pupils know where they stand. You emphasise working out why things happen as they do and work to meet the needs of the pupils. Your sanctions involve the pupils in putting things right, as well as making sure that pupils understand they have done something that is not acceptable.
- As mentioned above, there is a strong emphasis in the curriculum on promoting pupils' social development and well-being. You have implemented a specific programme to support the small number of pupils whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion. This has been successful and has contributed to a marked reduction in incidents of unacceptable behaviour and in the use of physical intervention. Your assessments show that pupils who attend this programme are making strong progress in their learning.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in their personal and social development, and across the wider curriculum, is assessed with the same rigour and attention to detail as in the academic subjects
- the range of opportunities for older pupils is extended to include more 'real-life' experiences, in order to further broaden their horizons and support the development of their employability skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

At the start of the day, we toured the school, visiting classrooms and greeting some members of staff. We met all staff at a short briefing meeting. One inspector observed pupils as they arrived by minibus and taxi, and spoke to some parents. We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection and agreed a plan for the rest of the day.

Accompanied by senior leaders, we visited classrooms in all five key stages to observe the staff and pupils at work. We also observed pupils at breaktime. We discussed aspects of the school's work with you and other members of the senior leadership team. I met the vice-chair of governors and two other governors. One inspector met formally with two groups of pupils to talk about their experiences of school.

We looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and plan for improvement and the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. I examined other documents and policies posted on the school's website. I looked at the 35 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including free-text comments. I also considered the views of 32 members of staff who completed the online questionnaire.