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Mrs Tania Craig
Executive Headteacher
New Horizons Learning Centre
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Dear Mrs Craig

Short inspection of New Horizons Learning Centre

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019 with Ofsted Inspector Hester Millsop, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You have continued to ensure that pupils are safe and make progress in their learning. Pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 have moved on to further education or taken up apprenticeships. Some younger pupils have returned successfully to mainstream schools to complete their education.

Staff know pupils and their families well. They are a tightly knit group, supporting each other to ensure that pupils are safe, ready to learn and make progress in their studies.

At the previous inspection, you were tasked with ensuring that pupils know what they should be achieving. Pupils appreciate the target sheets that they refer to. These show them precisely what they need to work on and what they need to do to improve. The inspector also noted that low-level disruption was not tackled swiftly enough to minimise disruption to learning. Staff have taken this on board and make effective use of the school's behaviour system to reward pupils' good behaviour and work. As a result, we saw no low-level disruption during this inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff members are trained to identify the signs pupils may show when they are at risk of harm. Through the training provided by senior leaders, they are aware of some of the specific risks in the local area. Good relationships with pupils' families mean that staff can support pupils effectively when situations require it.

Staff raise pupils' awareness of the risks they may face, including when they are online. Links with specialist agencies are used to support this work. As a result, pupils feel safe.

The procedures for ensuring that potential new members of staff are suitable to work with children cover most of the basic checks but not all of those required. During the inspection, staff took steps to rectify these.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have enhanced the curriculum since the previous inspection. The range of courses that pupils follow in key stage 4 is broad. For those pupils who receive their education at alternative providers, they follow specific vocational training courses, as well as English and mathematics. These are aligned to the independent careers advice and guidance pupils receive. The school's curriculum offer is leading to better outcomes for pupils currently in the school and ensures that pupils remain engaged in their learning. Consequently, very few pupils who have left the school in recent years did not continue in education or employment with training.
- Several pupils have returned to mainstream schools successfully in the last few years. This is because they are prepared well, have the strategies to manage their own behaviour and have the broad base of knowledge they need.
- Standards in English, particularly the quality of pupils' writing, and mathematics have not been strong in the past. Leaders have taken action to improve pupils' outcomes in these areas. Leaders responsible for these areas are effective in their monitoring. Based on their findings, they provide training in specific aspects of English and mathematics. They also provide support for teaching staff to ensure that they are more confident in their teaching.
- Teaching staff use their assessments to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Usually, learning is planned well to help pupils catch up. However, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is variable. For those pupils who have attended the school for a longer period, their progress quickens over time. However, changes out of school can destabilise pupils and this can affect their learning negatively. In both phases, pupils are verbally strong but their written work does not reflect their understanding. Their poor spelling, punctuation and grammar detract from the quality of their writing. In mathematics, older pupils can reason and apply their understanding, for example in calculating percentages. However, in both phases, pupils' work shows relatively few opportunities to solve more challenging problems.

- The number of fixed-term exclusions has been very high for many years. This reflects the school's very clear expectations of pupils' behaviour. Leaders are aware that the use of exclusion is high and have been working to reduce this.
- Staff have a good understanding of pupils' needs and the signs they display when they are becoming distressed. Staff follow the agreed systems consistently. They manage these situations well and are successful in helping pupils to return to their learning. The school's restorative approach to behaviour management is effective. Pupils repair broken relationships and move on quickly.
- Senior leaders monitor behaviour management information carefully. They use their findings to ensure that pupils receive the support and guidance that they need. As a result of leaders' actions and the consistent approach by staff, the number of incidents of poor behaviour is falling. The need to physically intervene has reduced and the need to exclude pupils has reduced. However, while lower, the number of exclusions is still high.
- Staff are skilled in identifying pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs when they join the school. They craft bespoke programmes for each pupil, often involving specialist agencies and a wide range of therapies. Many pupils in the secondary phase find Skye, the school's therapy dog, helpful in managing their own behaviour. Leaders monitor the impact of the support given to pupils diligently. This ensures that intervention support workers and student support workers are effectively deployed.
- Pupils' attendance at school has been low for several years. The proportion of pupils who do not attend school regularly has been very high. Leaders and staff with responsibility for managing pupils' attendance have worked tenaciously on this aspect of the school's work. This is bearing fruit. There is some, albeit slight, improvement in overall attendance. It remains well below the attendance levels seen typically. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has halved in the current academic year. This is now in line with the national comparator for similar schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of pupils' writing, particularly the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar, improves
- pupils' attendance continues to improve
- pupils' behaviour continues to improve so that the need to exclude pupils reduces further
- safeguarding record-keeping is sharper.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we observed learning in classes and looked at pupils' work on both of the school's sites. These observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Meetings were held with you, your senior leaders, teaching staff, the special educational needs coordinator, the subject leaders for English and mathematics and three governors. I spoke with your school improvement adviser and the local authority's strategic lead for education, improvement and commission.

We scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own analyses of its strengths and weaknesses, records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding records.

I considered the views of eight parents and carers who responded to Parent View, including five written comments. I also took into account the views of 29 pupils and 31 members of staff who completed Ofsted's online surveys.