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Mrs Melsa Buxton
Headteacher
Saxon Hill Academy
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Dear Mrs Buxton

Short inspection of Saxon Hill Academy

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 2018 with David Rzeznik, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. On 1 November 2015, the school converted to an academy and became a member of the Shaw Education Trust. You became headteacher in May 2017 and appointed a deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher to form the senior leadership team. The leadership team, governors and the Shaw Education Trust demonstrate a determined commitment to improving the outcomes for pupils. You and the leadership team have created an inclusive culture, with three different curriculum pathways to match the needs of the pupils who attend. You use these curriculum pathways effectively to 'inspire young people to take the lead in their own lives'.

You and leaders are committed to ensuring that all pupils are entered for the appropriate accredited assessments when they are in key stage 4 and post-16. You have been creative in your approach to the vocational curriculum, with varied vocational opportunities available both on site at the school and at off-site settings. For example, during the inspection, inspectors visited the on-site café where pupils were holding a coffee morning for former pupils. The lesson was well planned to match the skills and accreditation routes pupils were working towards. Consequently, pupils are confident, engaged and making good progress in their learning.

Staff build strong relationships with pupils. They are attentive to pupils' well-being and understand the complex needs of the pupils they teach. You and leaders have

developed a successful approach to teaching communication skills. This is shown well by children in early years, who are encouraged to use their voices and move their heads in response to the teacher's instructions. Children do this successfully.

Teaching is nearly always engaging, so that pupils enjoy learning, with work and activities matched to their needs and interests. However, in key stages 3 and 4 and in post-16 provision, teaching is sometimes less effective because assessment is not used well enough to plan work. Leaders do not yet work with other schools to ensure that the teachers' assessments are consistently accurate.

Pupils who spoke to inspectors are happy in school. They value being involved in plans to improve the school. They have contributed their ideas to improve the playground and are looking forward to the new roundabout. Pupils are taught about the needs of others and explained to inspectors how they raise money for different charities. Pupils like lessons and say that they are well cared for by the staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out all the required recruitment and vetting checks to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Staff and the local governing body are provided with appropriate safeguarding training. As part of checking these arrangements, Shaw Education Trust completes regular audits and any areas for improvement are quickly identified.

The leadership team has ensured that it has developed a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. For example, lunchtime staff are highly skilled in providing the correct diets for pupils. Staff know how to report any concerns they may have and these are quickly responded to by the person responsible for safeguarding.

Pupils feel safe in school and know whom to approach if they have any worries. The curriculum teaches pupils how to identify risks and stay safe.

Inspection findings

- You and leaders have accurately identified the areas for improvement, which is evidenced through your academy development plan. You have invested time in developing the middle leadership team. For example, learning conferences, established last term, include middle leaders. As a result, middle leaders know their departments well and provide appropriate support to teachers within them.
- Leaders have developed an assessment system to check small steps of progress towards pupils' curriculum targets. This enables the school to have an accurate record of what pupils can do and the next steps in their learning. Leaders expect teachers to use this assessment information to inform their planning. Teachers, who use assessment information well, plan work, which is accurately pitched to the needs of pupils. They utilise resources to support and motivate pupils. They are clear about what their pupils are learning and consequently pupils make good progress. However, not all teachers in key stages 3 and 4 and in post-16 use

assessment information well enough. As a result, in some activities, pupils do not progress as well as they should.

- The school collects relevant information about pupils' progress beyond the curriculum. They do this by monitoring the short-term outcomes from education, health and care plans and gathering information about pupils' engagement in lessons. Leaders have joined a national pilot project to determine how the monitoring and reviewing of pupils' engagement in lessons could help further inform their evaluation of pupils' progress.
- Leaders regularly check and hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make each term. These meetings enable leaders to plan and provide support and interventions when it is identified that a pupil is not making enough progress. However, leaders have not identified or put in place clear criteria to indicate when pupils are making good progress or outstanding progress. Consequently, they are not in a good position to determine whether progress is as strong as it could be.
- Children in early years receive a good education. Other professionals work closely with teachers to assess the needs of children. As a result, staff are well informed about their needs and provide learning opportunities that are well matched to these. Staff observe children and collect evidence of progress on a school-wide electronic system, which they then annotate with assessment information. Parents and carers are beginning to access this system and some have contributed to the observations of their child. These records show that children are making good progress.
- Leaders are sensitive to the medical needs of pupils and work closely with parents to improve the attendance of those pupils who could be in school more often. Attendance of some pupils has improved. However, the number of pupils who remain absent frequently is high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in key stages 3 and 4 and in post-16 use assessment information more successfully to plan lessons that are matched to the needs of pupils and enable them to make the progress of which they are capable
- leaders use the school's assessment information to distinguish between good and outstanding progress by seeking ways to moderate and validate school assessment findings with other schools
- leaders continue to work closely with parents to improve attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Clugston
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, members of the Shaw Education Trust, and the local governing body. Inspectors visited classes with senior leaders to observe the quality of teaching and learning. Account was taken of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six free-text comments, and the 21 responses from staff to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspectors spoke to pupils during and outside lessons and looked at their work in books and during lessons.

Inspectors reviewed a range of other documents, including your self-evaluation, school development plan, assessment and progress information, school parent survey, as well as documents relating to safeguarding, staff recruitment checks and child protection procedures.