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Mr Ben Slater
Head of Service
Stratton Education Centre
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Dear Mr Slater

Short inspection of the Stratton Education Centre

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2017 with Jennie Edwards, 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 centre was judged to be good in April 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 your appointment four years ago, you have established a strong strategic lead for the services provided through the Stratton Education Centre. You are ably supported by a management committee with a wide breadth of experience and depth of skills, and the services are continuing to improve. Together, you have ensured that each of the four sites: the Riverside Centre, the Stratton Centre, the Hospital and Home Education Service, and the Adolescent Unit continue to offer a good quality of service. You, the management committee, and the site leaders have an accurate view of the services, strengths and areas for improvement. Future developments, including the new buildings for the Stratton and Riverside centres, are carefully planned and well thought out.

Staff in each centre provide a welcoming and safe environment in which pupils can work and play. Exclusion rates are low. There is seldom a need for staff to physically intervene, for example when a pupil's behaviour slips due to their anxiety or frustration. During their stay, those pupils who previously did not enjoy school, or were anxious when with others, begin to enjoy learning, safely working alongside, and with, others.

All staff are determined to give pupils the best opportunities for their future lives.

They have made best use of the current buildings to provide a secure and productive learning environment. Pupils told the inspectors how much they appreciate their staff and the support they get from them. Staff told the inspectors how proud they were of having the privilege of working with the pupils, seeing them flourish and develop into considerate young adults.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your central oversight, combined with challenge and support by the management committee, has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are strong. Staff at each site have a resolute focus on the safeguarding of children and young people in their care. You and the site leaders frequently initiate, and drive, the coordinated work with other providers and agencies to support those who are most vulnerable due to their circumstances. All of the required checks are made on staff before they join the school. All school records are carefully kept. The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy, which staff understand and follow with the support of up-to-date training. Pupils reported to the inspectors that they feel safe in school. You have ensured that in lessons they learn how to keep themselves safe, for example when using modern technology.

Inspection findings

- The inspection's first line of enquiry concerned attendance. In the last inspection, the service was asked to reduce the number of pupils who were persistently absent. This has been done. You have a strong team that follow up pupils who are missing from school and they work closely with the education welfare officer to increase attendance. However, you are aware that the attendance of some pupils is still not good enough and this is an area that the service continues to have as an improvement priority.
- The second line of enquiry was to look at the work of the different sites. In the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that work matches the needs of pupils. The Hospital and Home Education Service, and the Adolescent Unit, work hand-in-glove with parents, health teams, other agencies and the pupils' mainstream schools. They continue to provide a curriculum that, wherever possible, the pupil was previously following. This seamless provision and support enables the pupils to reach their potential, given their medical needs.
- In our initial meeting, you identified that the school had been focusing on improving the literacy skills of pupils in the Stratton and Riverside centres. Senior leaders have identified that generally when pupils enter these centres their literacy skills are well below those expected for their age. In particular, their ability to read is very weak and they have an insufficient understanding of basic phonics to help them read. As a result, pupils are often reluctant readers. The centres have already started to improve pupils' literacy skills. A greater focus on developing reading skills in all lessons, as well as targeted individual support, is provided. In addition, new reading books have been purchased with the aim of encouraging pupils to read and develop a joy of reading for pleasure. Staff do not underestimate the level of challenge this poses, particularly for those pupils who

enter the centres part way through Year 11.

- Through meticulous observation, and the detailed analysis of pupils' work and behaviour, staff have identified that a considerable, and increasing, number of pupils join the Stratton and Riverside centres who have special educational needs and/or disabilities that have not been previously identified. Nevertheless, the special educational needs coordinator is tireless in getting pupils the right support when they join the centres. Those pupils who have education, health and care plans frequently make accelerated progress because of this.
- You are aware that some pupils have spent too long at the Stratton centre. You, along with the management committee, are resolute that this centre should not be used as a long-term provision. You are all determined to get pupils reintegrated into mainstream secondary schools, or, if the pupil needs it, a special school.
- The final line of enquiry considered what the school was doing to ensure that when pupils left the Stratton Education Centre they were in education, training or employment. The teams on each site provide good-quality careers advice to pupils. Pupils know what choices are available. They learn what, and how, to get the right examination results and experiences to follow their dreams. As well as helping pupils to get over any anxieties, for example, before they start college, staff continue to visit and support them so they are more likely to keep attending their courses.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the service works even more closely with other providers and services so that:

- pupils in the Stratton centre are returned to a mainstream school in a more timely manner
- pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities get 'early help' to reduce their exiting mainstream and get the support they need sooner
- attendance improves so that all pupils get the education to which they are entitled.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspectors met with you, other leaders, staff and members of the governing body. We visited all four sites. We spoke with pupils during lessons and met members of the school council. With staff, we scrutinised the quality of pupils' work. We took account of the six responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, we considered the recorded views of service users provided by leaders. There were no responses by staff or pupils to Ofsted's electronic questionnaire.

We considered a wide range of documentary evidence, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation, and behaviour records.