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Mr Steve Hughes  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Hughes

### **Short inspection of Wilson Stuart School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2019 with Derek Barnes and Rebecca Garratt, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 outstanding in February 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The executive headteacher's motto that all staff in the school are leaders is shared by the staff, who work extremely effectively to ensure that pupils make excellent progress. Leaders are quietly confident and challenge their own judgements about the effectiveness of the school through moderation, observation and external scrutiny. As a result, the school continues to improve its provision for pupils.

Leaders are outward looking and always seeking opportunities for pupils. They successfully garner support from funding bodies, the community and other educational providers to improve what is on offer. They train their own teachers to secure a supply of excellent practitioners, have written a bespoke middle leaders training programme and are training teaching assistants in the specialist skills needed to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The school is a vibrant and exciting place to be. Interactions between adults and pupils are invariably positive. Staff treat pupils with respect, allowing them to make choices and take control wherever possible.

The vast majority of staff say that they are proud to work at this school. They feel listened to and have a genuine role in school improvement. They are trusted to try

new things. For example, leaders asked staff for suggestions on how to spend their finances more effectively. Staff say that all of their ideas were taken up and as a result tangible savings have been made.

Governors have supported and challenged the school in equal measure. They expect the best of leaders and share leaders' 'can-do' attitude. More recently, they have ensured that the school extends its influence in a structured and well-managed way. They have ensured that the creation of a multi-academy trust benefits the school and that leaders' entrepreneurial spirit and vision for the wider education system in Birmingham are realised.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ample understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND. Indeed, they are invited to share these with the wider educational community by the local authority. Where there are safeguarding concerns, leaders deal with these quickly. To assist staff, leaders have designed clear and helpful flow charts. As a result, staff know what they should report, who to, and what action to expect. All safeguarding concerns are followed up and records make clear the actions taken and their impact.

Aspects of school life that pose a risk to pupils are well managed. This includes transport arrangements, which are effectively monitored by staff, making the arrival of dozens of transport vehicles each day safe and well organised. Many staff are first aid trained and leaders have thought carefully about how they store and help pupils use large equipment, such as standing frames and chairs, safely.

### **Inspection findings**

- The curriculum is highly personalised and appropriate for pupils' needs. For example, secondary-aged pupils have available to them a range of personalised pathways, which include personal, vocational and independence skills. A significant number of pupils access courses at entry level and GCSE. From their starting points, they do very well in these courses. The flexibility of the curriculum and the excellent progress pupils make within it demonstrate that leaders have the highest expectations of all pupils and, regardless of their needs, find ways to help them to be successful.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and exciting. Pupils across the school have ample opportunity to participate in all kinds of activities and learning. The breadth of the curriculum continues to grow, with leaders recently introducing verbal and non-verbal drama sessions, for example. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in one of these sessions where they were exploring role play and physical movement in a highly controlled way, learning swiftly with immense enjoyment.
- Elements of the curriculum are very effective in promoting pupils' welfare and safeguarding. For example, internet monitoring software identifies pupils who might need support with their mental health and well-being. A part of the personal, health, social and economic curriculum entitled 'preparing for

adulthood' covers how students can keep themselves safe while taking a full part in community activities, such as eating out and taking part in local nightlife.

- Pupils' destinations are at the heart of leaders' curriculum planning. Indeed, acknowledging that often when pupils left school they had few quality destinations to go to, the school opened its own further education provision. In recent years, all pupils have gone on to appropriate destinations as a result of the school's work in this area. Where pupils have a particular career aspiration, leaders ensure that the curriculum they follow will get them there. Pupils have plenty of work experience and have access to a range of courses at GCSE and post-16. Where pupils will not enter the world of work, leaders' focus is, rightly, on their communication, interaction, independence and contribution to society with opportunities such as volunteering.
- The wider curriculum contains a host of carefully structured learning opportunities. For example, inspectors observed a brass band performance during the inspection. Staff had structured this performance very carefully to ensure that all children, including the youngest, could take part. The staff themselves were taking part, singing along, clapping and dancing. This meant that those pupils who chose to could also take part exuberantly. There were many magical moments as pupils heard songs they knew and loved, felt the vibration of the brass instruments through their hands, wondered at the strangeness of a tuba and physically explored a range of musical instruments. Pupils used percussion instruments in a sensible and rhythmic way, coming together in a large-scale musical extravaganza. This event is indicative of many others that the school provides in its rich curriculum, such as arts performances, social events, sensory events, school shows and residential visits.
- Given the lack of access to speech and language therapy in this area, leaders have invested in training in order to develop a team of teaching assistants as communication experts. Leaders have invested a lot in this team, with many days of training. Teaching assistants involved have taken on the challenge with gusto. Their expertise is developing quickly. There are examples of parents being stunned at the swift progress in their child's communication and inspectors saw examples of teaching assistants developing pupils' communication very well. However, sometimes, staff do not take every opportunity available to develop pupils' skills in this area. Leaders already have strong plans to develop speech and language teaching further.
- Leaders take a simple approach to the assessment of pupils' learning, which is to measure pupils' progress against ambitious and realistic targets. When pupils enter the school, their abilities are established quickly and aspirational targets are set. Simple traffic light labels show staff where pupils need to quickly catch up. These are very easy for parents and carers to understand. This approach works well because it allows the unique curriculum to have a standardised assessment approach and for leaders to have a strong overview.
- Leaders use a range of moderation, both internal and external, to make sure that targets are as aspirational as they can be. Teachers and teaching assistants use regular assessments, both formal and informal, to shape the curriculum on a daily basis.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching assistants with specialist expertise in supporting pupils' communication continue to develop their skills in this area so that even more opportunities to develop this are harnessed.

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

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors scrutinised records and explored the school's procedures and culture around safeguarding. They observed learning and looked at pupils' work across a range of ages and developmental stages. They attended a musical event, reviewed the curriculum and spoke with leaders about how teaching and learning are evaluated.

The views of parents were evaluated through the 24 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 19 written responses from parents. There were two responses to the online pupil questionnaire. Inspectors took into consideration the 86 responses to Ofsted's anonymous online staff survey.

Inspectors met with the senior leadership team, a representative of the trust, teaching assistants and a range of teachers, and spoke with pupils throughout the inspection. They observed pupils arriving and leaving the school at the start and end of the day. They spoke with pupils during lessons and social times. They also spoke with representatives from a local university.