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9 November 2015

Mrs Jo Hodges
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hodges

Short inspection of Shorefields School

Following my visit to the school with Jason Howard HMI on 20 October 2015, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite there having been a complete change of staff in the leadership team, your expectations have been unrelenting. The new team are confidently supporting you to continually review and improve the way that teaching is organised and pupils' needs are met. Succession planning has been strong. For example, the retiring deputy headteacher spent time in the summer term working with her successor; this gave the new deputy headteacher a secure understanding of the school and its work.

One of the greatest strengths of the school is that the support staff provide expert levels of medical and physical care for pupils during lessons calmly and without disruption to learning. This ensures that pupils are very well cared for as they enjoy, learn and achieve. In what could have been a challenging moment for staff in a lesson, the medical needs of a pupil who experienced a crisis were dealt with quickly, calmly and appropriately. This did not distract other pupils or the teacher from the core content of the lesson, and is representative of how effectively staff meet the needs of all.

At the last inspection, inspectors commended leaders for the strong leadership and management of pupils' behaviour. During this inspection, it was evident that this has continued. Pupils' willingness to engage and take risks in their learning shows they have deep trust in the adults with whom they work and play. Similarly, they show that they enjoy each other's company. These relationships also help them to get the very best from playtimes and to socialise well when eating together. An atmosphere of peace and tranquillity pervaded the lunch break as pupils smiled and laughed. They enjoyed the opportunity to relax in the sunshine as well as to try out the range of activities available to them. These included go-karts, a wheelchair trampoline and climbing apparatus. In the lunch hall, a teacher displayed patient and tender care while supporting a child to develop the use of her eating skills.

The number of changes you have led since the last inspection demonstrate well your determination to continually improve the school and prepare pupils for the lives they will lead in the future. New positions have been created; these include the appointment of a learning link adviser and an interagency adviser. These members of staff have respectively given significant levels of support to pupils' families. They ensure the wider services involved in providing advice and medical care for pupils are challenged to make appropriate provision for them.

You are also enabling older pupils to develop their understanding of working environments effectively. This year, the opportunities they are offered in school include hospitality and catering, horticulture and some cottage industry work. Pupils are becoming involved in budgeting and planning for these enterprises and are helped well to begin to realise their own potential. A student served the inspectors lunch in the new café with quiet pride and diligent attention to detail as he calculated our change. The patience shown by the café manager as he supported the student to carry out his work was exemplary; this meant the student completed the task with very little help. To further enable pupils to understand that their contributions to the workplace are valuable, you have been instrumental in setting up 'Sailship', a community interest company dedicated to supporting young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop skills for work through a wider range of vocational opportunities.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified that leaders' checks on pupils' progress could be improved. You have addressed this in establishing the new leadership team with very rapid impact.

- All leaders now check pupils' progress with their teams and have a good understanding of how well individual pupils are achieving against a range of objectives related to both their learning and their well-being.
- Innovative work is well under way to establish a comprehensive analysis of pupils' learning and personal development. This will both keep up with changing national requirements, and refine the range of systems for recording the different aspects of pupils' achievement you currently use.

Safeguarding is effective.

The level of care given to pupils and the range of ways that they are offered to communicate their thoughts and feelings enables them to feel safe at school. Staff are patient and observant; they know pupils so well that even the smallest changes in behaviour or response are recognised and acted on.

Leaders have ensured that all the necessary safeguarding checks are in place and that policies are up to date. The safeguarding policy had been updated to meet recent changes to statutory requirements at the time of the inspection, and is scheduled to be agreed by governors at their November meeting. Records show that staff are appropriately and regularly trained to recognise and report child protection concerns. Documentary evidence shows that referrals of concerns to other agencies are timely and meticulous. Staff are tenacious in following up and pursuing further action when the responses to their concerns are not quickly acted on. Arrangements for both securing pupils' work experience opportunities and ensuring that they are safe, supervised and supported while undertaking them are meticulous.

Inspection findings

- You have effective procedures in place to enable all leaders and governors to understand the school's strengths and the areas that need further improvement. The new leadership team shares your aspiration for all pupils to achieve their potential and to be well cared for. Because you value leaders' contributions and skills, they are confident to make innovative suggestions and to lead improvements effectively. For example, 'the college' leader has identified that staff would benefit from being able to observe the specific aspects of their colleagues' teaching that are identified as being successful. The middle school leader is developing how staff can best use the aspects of teaching they enjoy most.
- Governors have worked with you to create a detailed framework against which the performance of staff is evaluated. Fine steps of progression in the expectations set mean that staff can easily see what they need to do to improve their work. Detailed guidance means that all staff understand how well they are doing and whether their contributions will result in a salary award. Through these processes, governors assure themselves that leaders are managing staff performance effectively.
- Governors know the school well. They visit regularly to assure themselves that pupils are well cared for and are making as much progress as they can. There is good evidence to demonstrate that they provide you with appropriate levels of challenge and ensure the information you share with them is accurate and validated.

- You have worked with staff and governors to create a set of expectations for 'outstanding teaching at Shorefields School'. All staff know these expectations, and their work is measured against them. Where development is needed, appropriate support is identified to help staff meet the requirements quickly.
- Behaviour is managed effectively, detailed records of incidents are kept and all occasions when physical intervention is required are appropriately logged. There is, however, no complacency, and leaders have identified that the school's approaches to behaviour management can be further improved. The new deputy headteacher is leading this development, and plans include the increased involvement of parents and the wider sharing of expectations with, for example, transport providers.
- Pupils are set relevant, challenging targets that reflect both their learning and their personal needs. Staff place a very high value on encouraging pupils to be independent in making and indicating their own choices; this means pupils can be part of the decision making about their learning and care. Classrooms are resourced well, and staff enable pupils to use these resources to enhance their learning and to help communicate their understanding. In a small number of instances, pupils are not given different activities to do when they find the whole class session too loud or over-stimulating.
- In every class, teachers provide thoughtful activities that interest and engage pupils. Some are inspirational in the extent to which they stimulate pupils' enjoyment of their new learning. For example: a sensory story lesson in which pupils explored materials which simulated rain, snow and cold wind; an early morning greeting where a pupil showed huge delight in being rewarded with a favourite song and a spin in her wheelchair for recognising her name; and a joyful session in the early years where children imaginatively responded to images of leaves, fireworks and fish under water, which were projected on the floor in a darkened room.
- Standards set for pupils' work in 'the college' are very high. Pupils work attentively and make good progress in their lessons, for example using eye movements and facial gestures to express their appreciation of a piece of music, demonstrating the emotions of characters in Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', and creating products from their woodwork and art lessons of exceptional quality. In an art lesson, pupils produced Christmas cards of a commercial standard and then worked to consider the profit they might make from selling them.

- The overwhelming majority of parents say they are confident that the school keeps their children safe and makes good provision for their learning. They speak highly of the difference the school is making to their children's learning and happiness, and appreciate the extra support their children receive in holiday times. They say that the additional support they receive has a positive effect on their home and family lives, particularly the specialist parenting programme and the opportunities for pupils' siblings to meet together.
- A local authority adviser visits the school on a termly basis; the content of these visits is decided in collaboration with school leaders so is effective in addressing specific priorities. Leaders also work closely with other schools, and particularly with the Essex Special Schools Education Trust (ESSET). Through this, they influence the development of practice and provide support to other local special schools.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- staff have opportunities to observe specific examples of practice that are effectively supporting pupils who have similar needs to the pupils they teach
- leaders complete their review of the systems for analysing and tracking pupils' progress in all aspects of their development.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the lower, middle and college leaders, the early years teacher, the interagency adviser, the learning link adviser, the member of staff responsible for organising work experience for pupils and governors. We visited all but two of the classes, spoke to some pupils and staff and, where relevant, looked at pupils' work. We observed pupils at break and lunchtime. Inspectors looked at a range of assessments of pupils' achievements and scrutinised improvement plans and leaders' evaluation of the school's work. We reviewed safeguarding records and information relating to behaviour and attendance. Because there were too few views from parents expressed on Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, inspectors looked at the results of the school's own survey from July 2015 and spoke to parents as they arrived at the school with their children. Contributions made by text during the inspection were also taken into account.