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Mr Paul Eteson
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Dear Mr Eteson

Short inspection of Harford Manor School

Following my visit to the school with Anthony Sharpe, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 24 November 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

'Harford Manor School has helped and supported my son at every stage of his development. This is done with professionalism and, above all else, care for individuals. The teachers, assistants and the headteacher are dedicated to seeing all pupils achieve their potential.' These words, written to inspectors by a parent, reflect the strengths of the school, which remains outstanding in the outcomes it achieves for its pupils.

You lead the school with passion and determination to provide all pupils with the skills they need to meet the challenges they face when they leave the school. This means they are supported to live and learn as confidently and as independently as they can. As well as the focus given to developing their key literacy, communication and mathematics skills, the curriculum is developed to enable them to learn well in a range of subjects. Pupils are also helped to understand the complexities of life in modern Britain through learning about different faiths and cultures. This is enhanced by their involvement in a range of local and long-distance trips and visits, and sporting and cultural opportunities. For example, pupils have been involved in creating a local art exhibition at which a number of pieces of their work were sold. It also resulted in an artist visiting the school and commissioning a piece of work from a pupil.

Your vision for enabling all pupils to make the most of their future education and employment opportunities is reflected in the school's charity shop. You have led the establishment of this as a successful concern in Norwich and all pupils, regardless of their level of need, have a part to play in its operation at some stage in their school career. As well as enabling pupils to participate in work-related opportunities, this project is raising the profile of their capabilities and qualities in the local community.

You are conscientious in ensuring that pupils' attainment is tracked and monitored carefully using systems that assess their progress against that made by pupils with similar needs nationally and against all pupils. This information shows that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make equally strong progress. Your uncompromising approach to ensuring good progress includes meeting with individual teachers each half term to analyse how well they are making sure pupils make the progress expected of them. Teachers say they find these meetings helpful in ensuring that strategies are in place to support pupils at risk of not making good progress. In a Key Stage 2 class, an atmosphere of focused determination filled the room as staff and pupils were intensively engaged in work planned in detail to move the learning of individual pupils on. The teacher's skilful questioning was challenging as well as being used to elicit how much pupils understood. Records of progress were detailed and activities designed well to meet more than one of each pupil's objectives for the term.

Despite the rigour of the systems in place, in a very small number of instances, the processes used for assessing pupils' progress and providing increasing challenge for learners on a day-to-day basis are not used well enough to move each pupil's learning on quickly.

Leaders' expectations of how pupils are valued and cared for are evident in the positive relationships that exist throughout the school. In all classes, pupils from the youngest Reception Year child to the oldest post-16 learner are treated with dignity and respected for the skills and attributes they bring to their learning. In the post-16 provision class, learners greeted staff appropriately with confidence and enthusiasm. Home and school diaries were used by both to highlight and share things the pupils had been enjoying out of school, any overnight health-related concerns from parents and other key information which helped staff engage fully with pupils.

The assistant headteachers use their knowledge and skills effectively to ensure staff manage and improve pupils' behaviour and meet their welfare needs. Case studies show how effective the combined work and care of all staff are in supporting pupils with challenging behaviour to improve their response to situations they find very difficult. All incidents of challenging behaviour are recorded and reported to senior leaders so that patterns of behaviour and triggers for its deterioration can be addressed. The recording of this over time, however, lacks enough detail to enable leaders to evaluate which approaches are the most effective. Behaviour seen during the inspection in all lessons and around the school was calm and purposeful. All staff are skilled in identifying when pupils' behaviour is at risk of deteriorating and they de-escalate potential incidents very effectively.

The previous inspection report identified that the monitoring work of middle leaders, staff who lead the improvement of different key stages and of subjects, could be better developed. You and the assistant headteachers have worked with these leaders, undertaking paired observations of teaching and developing better systems of assessment. These staff have played key roles in improving the quality of teaching by working in class with teachers to improve practice and by reshaping the work of teaching assistants. They have also reviewed how effectively some pupils are engaged in their work and how well they are supported to make better progress. The English subject leader has very effectively led work to improve phonics teaching and learning, and to develop pupils' communication skills. These leaders confidently model excellent practice in school and in other local schools. Their work is now a widely recognised strength of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and staff are vigilant in ensuring pupils are safe, child protection training is kept up to date and governors have undertaken safer recruitment training. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with vulnerable pupils. Child protection procedures are rigorous and there is evidence to demonstrate that staff have been resolute in challenging wider agencies to take action to support pupils whom they felt to be at risk when agencies were reluctant to do so. Through the curriculum, pupils are taught at an accessible level how to keep themselves safe and about risks they may be exposed to, for example gang culture and e-safety. Staff training about the risks pupils face and how to identify when pupils are exposed to risk is up to date. The Prevent training, which helps staff to recognise signs that pupils are exposed to any elements of extremism, has only recently been planned.

Rates of pupil attendance are in line with the average for secondary schools nationally and well above those of special schools nationally. Parents know that senior leaders expect them to let the school know if their children are going to be absent. If this does not happen, it is followed up very quickly. Few pupils are persistently absent, other than those with medical needs.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection, you have been unrelenting in empowering staff to further develop the provision made for pupils. Supported by the assistant headteachers, you have continued to challenge staff to have high expectations of pupils and to manage their behaviour positively. As a result, achievement has continued to improve and pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their personal lives, education or further placements.
- Changes to practice and innovative strategies are encouraged and used to help pupils achieve well. For example, you have recently implemented new ways of helping pupils to improve the use of their facial muscles to eat and talk. There is good evidence to show that these strategies are supporting pupils effectively to develop these key skills.

- Procedures for monitoring teaching are thorough and you have a robust evidence-base against which you judge the performance of each teacher. This includes information gathered from lesson observations and shorter 'drop-ins' to lessons, and from data about pupils' progress. Governors have a good understanding of how you analyse this information and are confident that it is used well in making decisions about teachers' salaries.
- You are not complacent about pupils' achievement. Now that your evidence shows that the vast majority of pupils are making good and better progress, you are focusing on ensuring that the pupils who make the least progress are further challenged. Systems for setting expectations for pupils link the annual review of their progress with their personal support plans very well. Almost all teachers record pupils' progress in detail and use this information to plan the next steps for their learning.
- Governors have increasingly sharpened the focus of their work. They have made sure that the extent to which they hold leaders to account for improving the school is accurately recorded. They have also made sure that the way information about pupils' achievement is shared with them is clear and relevant to helping them understand how well pupils are doing. They are involved in identifying priorities for improvement each summer. They regularly make visits to the school to validate their understanding of the quality of teaching and to determine how well the required improvements are being made.
- Post-16 provision is effective in enabling learners to develop the attitudes and skills they need to access further education opportunities and to manage their lives beyond school as independently as possible. Learners are supported well to learn how to manage their own simple budget, organise themselves and to understand the expectations of further education and workplace placements.
- In a very small number of instances, teachers do not monitor pupils' progress on a day-to-day basis well enough. This means that the level of challenge is sometimes not high enough so pupils' learning does not move on as quickly as it does where teaching is best.
- The rigour of your monitoring of achievement and the quality of teaching is not matched in all aspects of monitoring. As a result, although self-evaluation is accurate, it is not always possible to identify which actions other leaders take are the most effective or provide the best value for money, for example, in assessing which strategies for managing behaviour are the most effective.
- Analysis of your parent survey and discussion with a group of parents show that the vast majority are confident in the work of the school. They say that communication is strong and that the changes in their children's learning and behaviour have made a significant difference to their family lives, as well as increasing their children's opportunities to live fulfilling lives.

- Leaders are instrumental in developing provision for pupils who are disabled and who have special educational needs across schools in the region. Through your work as part of the SEN Trust Norfolk partnership, you have worked with the local authority to develop a better understanding of the performance of special schools. Other staff provide well-respected outreach support to their colleagues in mainstream schools. The local authority provides an annual challenge partner visit to the school, which has validated your judgements and endorsed the quality of the school's work.
- The school's buildings are a potential barrier to the outstanding achievement of pupils. Space is limited and there is little room for specialist provision to be made. For example, the space available for physical education and sensory circuits is too small. Although leaders make good, creative use of external facilities and this, in some ways, is beneficial for pupils in developing their independence, the quality of the school's work is at risk of being undermined by the learning environment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all staff use equally rigorous processes for assessing pupils' progress and make rapid adjustments to make sure every pupil moves on quickly in their learning
- all leaders pay the same attention to monitoring the impact of actions they take over time so that they know which are the most effective and give the best value for money.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the assistant headteachers, the phase leaders, the early years teacher, the inter-agency adviser, the learning link adviser, the member of staff responsible for organising work experience for pupils, and governors. We visited classes, spoke to some pupils and staff and, where relevant, looked at pupils' work. We observed pupils during breaks and at lunchtimes. 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 messages during the inspection were also taken into account.