

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



4 February 2016

Mr Jason Cook  
Headteacher  
Whitfield Aspen School  
Mayfield Road  
Dover  
Kent  
CT16 3LJ

Dear Mr Cook

### **Short inspection of Whitfield Aspen School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 January 2016, 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 good in June 2012.

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

This is a highly inclusive, inventive and aspirational school. It is on a journey of continuing improvement and change. The school caters very well for the needs of pupils with profound, severe and complex needs in its Aspen provision. These pupils, and those in the mainstream, are taught very successfully alongside each other. There is considerable, very purposeful integration between Aspen and mainstream pupils to the benefit of all. This helps them to become well-rounded and well-behaved individuals. Comments from parents summed these strengths up. One said, 'My children... are encouraged to aspire to great things. They are determined to do well and have fantastic imaginations'. Another added, 'Our children understand inclusion and diversity'.

Led very effectively by the headteacher and other senior leaders, the school has worked successfully to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection. There has been a thorough review of leadership and management. This has been highly successful in ensuring there is the capacity and expertise to lead and manage the school in all its complexity. Governors and staff, working with the local authority and the community, have a clear strategy for the school as it is now and as it may develop in the future. The school's two parts are, as far as possible, managed together. Pupils clearly benefit from this. It leads to the efficient use of resources. Pupils enjoy an interesting and broad curriculum. They are happy to take responsibility and like being at school.

The school has recently and sensibly improved its provision in the teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds) and spelling, punctuation and grammar. This was because pupils had not performed as well in these areas as in others. Generally, pupils are challenged in their learning. Teaching is purposeful and positive. Lessons engage pupils well and make them think. Pupils make consistently good progress from their starting points. However, sometimes pupils could be expected to do even better. The school should aim to increase further the number of pupils reaching the higher levels in English and mathematics, which is below average.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Senior leaders ensure suitable, thorough arrangements for keeping pupils safe. Necessary records are detailed and of high quality. The school site is appropriately secure. Thorough checks on staff and other adults are made when they are recruited. These are carefully recorded and updated. All staff are properly and regularly trained in child protection procedures. Pupils feel safe, secure and well looked after. All pupils who responded to the online questionnaire strongly agreed that the school encourages them to look after their emotional and mental health.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils achieve well. The school monitors all pupils' learning closely and can show that Aspen and mainstream pupils make good progress. Last year, more than three quarters of mainstream pupils in Year 6 achieved Level 4 or higher in English and mathematics. Almost all made at least expected progress.
- Children in the Reception classes make good progress. They do well from their starting points through a well-planned curriculum, and are suitably prepared for learning in Year 1 and beyond.
- Staff know the complex needs of Aspen pupils in detail and meet them very well. Pupils' individual plans are clear and well used. Staff are knowledgeable and well trained. They work hard together and are well organised.
- Teaching is lively, positive and engaging across the school. Senior staff are adept at supporting and guiding any improvements that are needed.
- Staff almost universally feel well led and supported. They are happy and proud to work at the school.
- All subjects are led well by the school's team of middle leaders. Humanities, arts, physical education and science subjects are all taught profitably, in some cases by specialist teachers.
- The school's excellent integration of pupils with very different needs helps pupils to understand core British values, including tolerance and understanding. The broad curriculum reinforces and adds to this understanding.
- The school makes good use of learning outside the classroom. Pupils learn from many useful and enjoyable educational visits and a good range of well-attended out-of-school-hours clubs and activities. On the day of my visit, some Aspen pupils benefited from a regular visit out to the nearby farmers' market.

- The school buildings and grounds are stimulating and well maintained. Space and resources are used very well.
- The school has great expertise in, and many excellent resources for, teaching pupils with special educational needs. Pupils in the mainstream classes are well served by this, along with those in Aspen.
- The school has two full-time special educational needs coordinators. Working with the senior leaders, they ensure that pupils' needs are met effectively day by day in Aspen and the mainstream school. They also efficiently manage many aspects of pupils' safeguarding and, when needed, work closely with families and the school's family workers.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are smartly dressed, polite and friendly. The rate of attendance is average. Pupils are happy to help others in different ways, by being school councillors or organising lunch boxes, for example. Parents and pupils are pleased by this good behaviour. However, some parents take the view that occasionally the behaviour policy is applied more leniently for some pupils than others. This can seem unfair and sometimes is felt to hold back all pupils' learning.
- Most parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire consider that the school communicates with them well. Some disagree and would like more information, especially about their children's progress.
- The school evaluates itself honestly and accurately. This helps it to identify the right areas for further improvement. The school improvement plan is well organised and useful. However, some of its success criteria lack precision, which makes it harder for the staff to gauge exactly how well they are doing when seeking to improve outcomes for the pupils.
- The school has many good management systems. For example, the performance management of staff is effectively carried out. However, some systems could be used more sharply to even better effect. For instance, the school accounts for its pupil premium funding well. Staff know how individual pupils entitled to pupil premium support are faring. However, the school does not aggregate this information to check in detail whether there are any key strategic lessons to learn about how effectively the funding is spent and the impact it has on a range of outcomes for pupils.
- The governing body is well led and organised. Governors are knowledgeable. They support and challenge the school well. All share a clear vision and sense of purpose. They are highly committed and strategic in their work.
- The local authority supports and monitors the school well. For example, its advice and support on leadership changes and the future strategic direction of the school are valuable. It supports the specialist work within Aspen well.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are raised further still so that, in particular, more pupils reach higher attainment levels
- the school's existing good management systems are used even better so that, for example, the overall impact of pupil premium expenditure is more thoroughly understood.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Kent County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I visited lessons in all classes, jointly with the headteacher and other senior staff. I visited the Aspen classes, which cater for 80 pupils with profound, severe and complex special educational needs. I looked at pupils' work and held discussions with pupils. I observed at playtimes, lunchtimes and as pupils moved around the school. I met with the headteacher, senior leaders, members of staff and governors. I also met a representative of the local authority. I took account of the 53 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered responses from members of staff and pupils to their confidential online questionnaires. I evaluated documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plans, records for individual pupils and minutes of meetings.