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Ms Janet Dunn OBE
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Dear Ms Dunn

Short inspection of Meath School

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 2016 with Ross MacDonald, 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 school was judged to be outstanding in January 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

School leaders' inexorable and passionate devotion to the school shines through all aspects of their work. The school is bursting with energy: all staff push pupils to achieve beyond the limits of what previously might have been thought possible. In particular, the pupils themselves develop an inspiring determination to learn, achieve success and overcome their difficulties.

Parents are universally positive about the school, and the following view was typical of the many comments received by the inspection team: 'This is an amazing school, where each unique child is put at the centre of their learning. The staff and leadership are always pushing the boundaries of what the school and its pupils can achieve.' Another parent said, 'My child has a future because of Meath.' Staff, too, feel privileged to work in the school. One staff member summed up staff views on the school as 'a simply inspiring place to work and study'.

A clear sense of moral purpose drives you and your staff: to unlock pupils' ability to speak and communicate so that they can appreciate and forge links with the world around them. The school's relentless focus on developing speech and communication skills is tangible even in the youngest pupils. No opportunity is missed to encourage and praise talk and conversation. During breaktimes, lunchtimes and in the boarding

provision children are encouraged to be children together. They play, learn, communicate and develop friendships, all of which they might not have experienced otherwise. During the inspection it was heart-warming to see the openness of pupils and their intrinsic motivation to communicate with others. Pupils are interested in people. Whether shyly polite or boldly curious, pupils understand that connections with others are important and life-enhancing. In short, inspectors agreed with parents who commented that the school enables their children to 'find their voice'.

A major strength of the school is its integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers, assistants and therapists work closely together as a team to assure pupils' progress. Pupils are really pushed to try hard and they rise to the challenge. Staff members' dynamic modelling of correct speech and signing, laser-sharp assessment and questioning, balanced with patience and persistence, give pupils the time and space to practise and master their communications. Although they are supported extremely well, pupils have to do tasks for themselves and learn to be independent; no one does their work for them.

The development of staff is a key strength of the school. There are many instances of volunteers growing into teaching assistants, who then progress further, becoming therapists, teachers and leaders. All staff work towards exacting professional standards. Their work is monitored closely and they benefit from first-rate training and professional development. Communication throughout the school is excellent and good practice is shared. In this way, the specialist knowledge of staff is deepened; continuity is assured and staff's loyalty and commitment to the pupils strengthened even more. As one member of staff commented, 'We are secure in our roles, our relationships and our interactions with the children for whom we make such a difference.'

Following the last inspection, leaders took immediate action to tackle the recommendation for improvement. The curriculum was reviewed and more opportunities developed for pupils to learn about different cultures, religious faiths, customs and British values. Pupils now have a rich and diverse experience that helps them to look outside of themselves and consider others. In this way they are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps.

Safeguarding is effective.

Checks on the suitability of staff working in the school are carried out thoroughly and meet all statutory requirements. Staff know the pupils very well, are mindful of their welfare and report any concerns promptly. All training for staff and the designated leaders for safeguarding and child protection is completely up to date.

Records of any concerns about safeguarding are kept in excellent order and indicate that swift and appropriate actions have been taken. The school works very effectively with other agencies supporting families and children. Close communication between the school and the residential care staff helps to keep pupils secure and safe from risk of harm. Pupils feel safe in the school and know how to report any worries or fears.

Inspection findings

- Developing staff members' confidence and encouraging them to take risks are key priorities for the school. No one masks difficulties or avoids problems because they are fearful of mistakes: pupils' particular needs are tackled head-on and, as a result, they become more resilient and confident in themselves.
- Leaders and staff have scrutinised pupils' responses and noted that sometimes they appear to be focused on the teacher, but are really lost in their own world because of their communication difficulties. As a result, teaching in this school is typically animated and compelling in order to capture pupils' full attention and interest. Lessons are challenging and demand pupils' concentration. Teachers stretch pupils and do not shy away from directing them to grapple with something difficult or unfamiliar.
- Teaching assistants and therapy staff observe pupils' responses and levels of engagement in minute detail and are poised to intervene quickly to reinforce, support and extend learning. They skilfully take crucial opportunities to capitalise on the key moment of learning to push pupils just a little bit further with, for example, some repetition of key words or composition of a full sentence or extended answer.
- Pupils have to work hard: their efforts to communicate and manage their physical selves sometimes lead to weariness, but they keep going because they want to learn. They know that school and their progress are important.
- Staff note and capture pupils' steps to success throughout lessons and a comprehensive picture is built up of each pupil's progress. Pupils' overall development is evaluated through the 'then, now, because' overview, which outlines exactly how far pupils have progressed since they started and what has made the most difference.
- Outcomes are outstanding. Pupils make excellent progress in all areas of the curriculum and especially in their speaking and communication. Many pupils begin their time at the school with very low starting points, but their progress is rapid and sustained over time.
- Leaders set high targets and check rates of progress assiduously. Pupils' attainment is measured against national benchmarks and leaders are keen to set even more ambitious targets. Staff rightly assess and review pupils' personal and social development as closely as their academic gains. Pupils' achievement and goals are constantly under review to ensure that their progress does not stall.
- Leaders insist that staff set targets that will take pupils to the next step; 'consolidation' targets are not acceptable. No excuses are made for poor progress because of underlying learning difficulties; school leaders and staff never give up trying to improve outcomes for each pupil. Although so much has already been achieved, leaders are looking to develop an even more precise system of measuring and comparing the progress of pupils with similar starting points. Leaders are keen to demonstrate unequivocally that there need be no ceilings on rates of progress for their pupils.
- Pupils enjoy reading and sharing books. They were very keen to read to me, talk about their books and show off their developing confidence. Many pupils quickly learn to decode words but their deeper comprehension is less secure.

The school has wisely focused closely on improving pupils' understanding of more advanced vocabulary and developing inference and deduction skills.

- The school offers and delivers a wide range of support for other schools, particularly those in the confederation of which it is a part. The school is recognised as an outstanding source of expertise in the field of speech, language and communication needs and leaders are keen to promote the work of the school further afield in order to widen their sphere of influence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's systems for measuring and evaluating pupils' progress develop further and are measured against reliable, ambitious and achievable benchmarks for pupils with similar starting points
- opportunities to share the expertise held within the school increase locally and nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders, groups of staff and a group of pupils. We toured the site and visited all classes to observe teaching and learning and look at pupils' work. I also heard a group of pupils reading. Checks were made of the school's safeguarding procedures, including the vetting of staff, record-keeping and staff training. We observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtime. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including information about pupils' progress, curriculum planning and information about the performance of staff. I spoke to the Chair of the Governing Body on the telephone. We considered the 33 responses to the online staff survey, which included 12 written comments about the school. The inspection team also received 29 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 17 of which included written comments from parents. A routine inspection of the school's residential provision was carried out at the same time as this inspection, the findings of which are published in a separate report.