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Mr Fyfe Johnston
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Johnston

Short inspection of The Clare School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2016 with Vanessa Love, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The Clare school is a positive, vibrant place to be. The leadership team has maintained and further improved the outstanding quality of education provided by the school since the previous inspection. School leaders, staff and governors are highly ambitious for the school and are keen to improve the outcomes achieved by pupils even further.

You lead a committed staff team with endless enthusiasm. Staff reflect this in all they do. They are rightly proud to work at the school and to be a part of the team. Everyone – staff, pupils, parents and carers – is encouraged to learn and continue to learn. For example, a significant proportion of staff are currently undertaking training to be able to use British Sign Language. Many more have already completed this and hold the associated formal qualifications. This, alongside staff's determination to enable every pupil to have the chance to communicate, and make their own decisions, makes the school an environment where children are really listened to.

Other staff have been encouraged to undertake research projects, developing aspects of the curriculum to make them accessible to pupils and to support staff to understand how those with the most complex needs learn. This inspirational work is well supported by leaders. Staff say they feel empowered by the headteacher to take well considered risks to develop the learning opportunities offered to young people. Staff say they are, 'trusted as a professional' to do their job and, 'to be

creative' in their teaching. Others say that they are, 'held to account in a positive way; as a team we work together to make a difference.' All are unanimously proud to be working at the school. As a result, staff are creative about their approaches and embrace any challenges that are presented. They ensure that pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and are very happy to come to school as often as they can.

Leaders, governors, staff and pupils all agree that this school is an excellent place to be. When asked what was the most important part of their school for them pupils were keen to tell the lead inspector that it is the staff. They describe staff as fun, kind, thoughtful and caring but say that they are willing to challenge, encourage and motivate them to work hard so that they are successful in their futures. Pupils feel that this results in the happy and engaging atmosphere that can be felt by all around the school.

The proportion of pupils whose needs are most complex is increasing, especially in the early years and at key stage 1. These pupils have high level physical needs but in many cases are very capable young people who have the capacity to meet the stretching and aspirational targets set for them. As a result, you and your staff have developed the provision for these pupils through the introduction of staged curriculum routes. All of these routes have their own detailed curriculum expectations and highly skilled staff teach these well. They are ably supported by a range of support staff who meet the varied and complex needs of youngsters in a calm, thoughtful manner. This ensures that the dignity of pupils is maintained and they make strong progress in their learning.

Parents value the way staff at the school communicate with them about their child's needs and share in the small successes that happen along the way. Parents who are very new to the school feel that pupils are well supported to settle into the routines of the school. This is sometimes through your staff working closely with the school pupils move from.

Staff work in a planned and thoughtful way to support pupils who attend local mainstream schools. Sometimes, where appropriate, this means that pupils move to your school. Staff implement detailed plans as a result of this high-quality outreach work to ensure that pupils' needs are met well. As a result, placements are successful. On other occasions, pupils are well supported to remain in their mainstream school where staff who work with them receive training from your staff to help them develop the necessary skills to meet pupils' needs.

Post-16 learners are offered many opportunities to be independent in the wider community, such as working with a local bakery. Through their life skills activities, pupils are encouraged and supported to access the community and participate fully in everyday activities such as buying the bread. School staff have taught key workers in these stores to communicate effectively with the young people. As a result, learners are able to complete orders independently, pay for their goods and return to school. The pride and self-confidence engendered by this work in the young people involved was very evident. The range and breadth of qualifications available to pupils at varying points in their learning shows that young people are challenged to achieve well in a broad range of subjects. Learners are offered access to college courses and given a wide range of opportunities to prepare them for the work place.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective, well managed, fit for purpose and rigorous. Records are detailed and of exceptional quality. All safeguarding related policies and procedures are in place and meticulously followed. Leaders and governors ensure that the relevant checks are made when employing new staff. Pupils say they feel safe and are kept safe by staff that care and are thoughtful about their needs and difficulties. They say that there is little bullying in the school and that they are confident any concerns that might arise will be quickly addressed by staff. Pupils could explain very well how they have learned to keep themselves safe. Staff have taught them to manage any difficulties that may arise by using a range of appropriate strategies. These have been well rehearsed and so pupils are confident that they can use them if necessary.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, the range of developments that have been made is wide and continually expanding. Areas for improvement, identified in the previous inspection report, have been addressed. All staff are ambitious about expectations for pupils and outcomes are high across a broad range of subjects. At no point have leaders taken their eye off the ball and the provision remains outstanding in all aspects. The active governing body, alongside a committed and determined extended leadership team, ensure that the needs of pupils are at the heart of all they do.
- The inspiring leaders and incredibly highly skilled staff ensure that all aspects of the provision are well considered and closely matched to the needs of each individual pupil within the school. The curriculum and the work planned within it shows how well teachers use their knowledge of pupils and of their current learning to continuously alter targets set and make changes to their planning. As a result, pupils meet the increasingly high expectations set for them.
- The school's curriculum includes a vast number of subjects, experiences and trips to support pupils' learning. For example, pupils have opportunities to take part in creative art, music, communication, and in a range of sports. They learn to cooperate and are supported to manage their own and others' anxieties well. This contributes well to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development as well as their academic development.
- With the recent development of the extended senior leadership team, there is now excellent capacity for continued improvement. The addition of the new middle leadership tier is ensuring that the capacity of the leadership team is improved still further. Middle leaders have relished the challenge; they are highly skilled in their areas of responsibility and focus effectively on improving outcomes for pupils. As a result, pupils make excellent progress.

- Governors are well informed through their frequent and rigorous checks on the work of the school. As a result, they have an accurate view of the strengths in teaching and in pupils' outcomes. They are not complacent and provide effective support and challenge for leaders so that the school's achievements continue to improve.
- Senior and middle leaders have identified a wide range of appropriate assessment tools to check how pupils are doing. Wider aspects of pupils' learning, including personal development, and the progress they make in improving self-confidence and self-esteem, are well recorded. Leaders are coordinating these assessment systems; this has the potential to highlight, even more quickly, any factors causing a decline in a pupil's success. This will ensure that the effective range of interventions which the school adopts can be put into practice more swiftly.
- In the early years, pupils make their own choices both about which activities to do but also then about how to complete them. The choices are well supported by staff who have a deep and detailed understanding of each pupil's needs. The early years environment is well organised and stimulating. Activities meet children's needs and do not place a limit on how much progress they can make.
- Children are highly motivated and, even when communication is limited, can use a variety of non-verbal signs and cues which skilled staff understand. As a result, children are able to make their feelings known and understood. The introduction of early signing is ensuring that these children are also heard by the adults who work with them.
- The school's self-assessment is detailed and accurate. It reflects well the strengths achieved and highlights the areas which leaders and staff wish to improve further. Targets are sharply focused on the right aspects for development and reflect well the aspirational outcomes leaders and staff have for all pupils.
- Checks on teaching and learning are based on broad and robust evidence, they are used to create a robust analysis of its quality. This information is effectively used to inform performance review meetings and to support the setting of staff targets. Training is specifically tailored to the needs of staff and to the learning of the pupils they support. In this way, staff are continually improving their practice and as a result, are equipped to meet the changing needs of the pupils they teach.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is well considered. There is evidence that there are opportunities to develop all these aspects through the wide ranging curriculum planned for individuals throughout the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they use the already comprehensive analysis of pupils' academic progress and personal development to quickly make changes if pupils' progress slows.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Norfolk County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other representatives from the leadership team and teaching staff. They also spoke with a group of pupils and governors. A call was made to a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and as they moved around the school. Pupils' work and folders were also reviewed. Recent progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised. Inspectors also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and reviewed the outcomes from the school's own parent survey and spoke to parents.