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Mr Colin Hughes
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hughes

Short inspection of Elleray Park School

Following my visit to the school on 6 July 2016 with Caroline Pollard, 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 December 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher took up their posts in January 2016 following the secondment of the substantive headteacher to a senior position within the local authority. The transition has been seamless because of governors' actions to ensure that leadership is strong at all levels. The acting headteacher is well established in the school and has the respect and support of pupils, their parents and adults who work there. Leaders' vision to be the area's number one provision for pupils with complex learning disabilities has ensured that the school remains focused on the job in hand. Consequently, leaders have already built on the excellent work of the substantive headteacher so that teaching is first-rate and pupils' learning and welfare are straight from the top drawer.

There is no doubt that a key to the school's success is adults' detailed and knowledgeable understanding of pupils' specific needs and interests. Adults use their understanding to build relationships with pupils and their parents that are second to none. Each pupil is special and from the moment they arrive at school each day, adults ensure that they promote learning effectively at every opportunity. This is made possible because of extremely effective communication between the school and parents.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that adults who work at the school are checked appropriately and thoroughly. The school's single central record is maintained to a high standard so that leaders can see at an instant that checks on adults are up to date and meet requirements.

All adults are trained in the use of safe physical intervention strategies. The school has at least one paediatric nurse on site at all times throughout the school day. There is an effective programme in place to ensure that a suitable number of adults are trained to administer medication when required and in specialist procedures such as gastric feeding. Leaders ensure that adults are trained to recognise the signs that might indicate abuse and how to respond appropriately if they have a concern about a pupil. As a result pupils are safe in school.

The school's own records, along with the views of parents and pupils and the observations of inspectors during the inspection, corroborate the view that bullying is very rare at Elleray Park. Leaders keep detailed records of significant incidents, such as when a pupil has to be held by an adult. These records need to be strengthened further so that leaders can use the information to evaluate accurately the impact of their work to reduce serious incidents and keep pupils safe.

Leaders take this group of pupils' vulnerability to extremist views seriously. Leaders have embraced the government's 'Prevent' duty as a framework on which to build pupils' resilience from an early age. Every opportunity is taken by adults to encourage pupils to discuss and consider tolerance and respect in an age- and ability-appropriate manner. For example, records show that pupils in the foundation stage class have impromptu discussions about differences when opportunities arise in other class activities. This is commendable practice and is contributing to pupils' ability to keep themselves safe now and in the future.

Inspection findings

Pupils and their parents cannot praise the school highly enough. There is a sense of overwhelming support for leaders, the work the school does and its impact on pupils' progress. Without exception, pupils who responded to the online survey said they were happy, felt safe, had friends, made progress, received help and liked coming to school. Parents who responded to the online survey, along with those who we spoke with, were able to support their own view that 'Elleray is an amazing school'. For example, one parent asked to describe Elleray Park School wrote: 'extremely helpful, friendly and their encouragement to get the best out of their pupils is both outstanding and remarkable'. Another parent's response included, 'my son has complex learning difficulties, severe autism, is non-verbal and has challenging behaviour. The staff are brilliant at looking after him, keeping him safe, and most importantly on helping him achieve and progress within his own capabilities. I have full confidence in Elleray Park school.' We were able to corroborate these views through lesson observation, discussions with leaders, other staff and pupils and through our scrutiny of a range of documentation provided by the school.

- The quality of teaching across the school has improved since the last inspection. Leaders have not rested on their laurels. The implementation of an effective performance management system has ensured that teachers and support staff have maintained their focus on how they can improve the rate at which pupils progress. Teachers who are new to the school receive excellent support and are quickly brought within the fold of Elleray Park. The sharing of good practice and ideas is commonplace amongst adults throughout the school. Evidence seen during our visits to classrooms and from looking at pupils' work in their books and on walls around the school, shows that pupils benefit from a vast array of learning experiences that are tailored expertly to their specific needs. Excellent teaching is resulting in pupils' exceptional progress.
- Pupils also benefit immensely from the broad range of therapy and additional medical support services provided by the school. Highly focused support packages, in the form of precise interventions with pupils, or training for staff in how to support pupils' specific needs, are integrated successfully into the day-to-day routine at Elleray Park. As a result, pupils' academic, personal and physical development is supported to flourish because they are given the skills to overcome their very specific difficulties. I observed one pupil move around the classroom using a walking frame with no help from an adult. This was a direct result of a well thought out and coordinated approach designed to challenge this pupil and is an example of excellent pupil progress.
- Improvements in the teaching of science have ignited the interest and inquisitiveness of pupils throughout the school. Investigation is the name of the game in science at Elleray Park. The building blocks for scientific investigation are laid in the early years groups as pupils begin to identify their own body parts and move on to explore new environments, such as in the 'mud pit' for example. Pupils progress because they experience real-life science, by taking part in the Forest Schools Project for instance. Records of pupils' work in their books and on displays around school show that pupils' questioning skills are excellent. Pupils' discovery of an egg, followed by 'poo', in the school, led to a whole-school investigation into life cycles and the eventual discovery of a dinosaur. These are excellent examples of how the school has successfully challenged pupils to improve their scientific study skills.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around school is undeniably excellent. Their attitudes to learning are of the highest level and do not wane as the day progresses. Pupils' personal development and welfare is given the highest priority by all those working at the school. One group of pupils has been given the responsibility of being play leaders, for example. As a result pupils trust the adults who work with them and respond accordingly to their directions and requests. Pupils who are known to have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time are brought back on track swiftly by adults so that learning hardly ever falters. Pupils' excellent behaviour contributes significantly to their progress.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next steps in their lives. The school's records show that as pupils leave the early years to enter key stage 1 they have developed their self-confidence and basic skills at least in line with their peers in other similar schools. In Year 6, pupils are challenged

further to express themselves and to develop their independence skills. While leaders' records do not show precisely the gains in pupils' personal development, our observations of pupils leaving school to visit their future secondary school, our discussions with other pupils and our observations of pupils' excellent behaviour during a fire alarm evacuation of the school, corroborate the view that Year 6 pupils have the necessary skills to succeed beyond Elleray Park.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen further their analysis of their records of serious incidents, so that they can identify trends and patterns even more quickly and take rapid action when the need arises
- they extend their analysis of progress information to include measures of improvement in pupils' personal development, so that they can evaluate even more precisely the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wirral. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We had conversations with you and other leaders, four governors, teachers, a small number of parents, several pupils and a representative from the local authority.
- We observed a selection of lessons across the school, one of which was a joint observation with you.
- We looked at pupils' work during our visits to classrooms. We also scrutinised samples of pupils' work displayed on walls around the school and in books provided by the school.
- We observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils as they ate their lunch and at break times.
- We took account of responses to surveys by pupils, parents and staff.
- We scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school, including: self-evaluation by leaders; the school's development plan; and information on attendance. We also examined documents used to record behaviour and safeguarding concerns; information relating to students' progress and records of leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning.