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Mrs Cheryl Smart
Headteacher
Alfreton Park Community Special School
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Dear Mrs Smart

Short inspection of Alfreton Park Community Special School

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 2016 with Karen Lewis, 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 good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils are engaged in their learning and are making good progress. All students who left the school last year are now attending colleges to develop their independent living skills further.

Pupils are confident, self-assured and willing to share their views. They are highly motivated and talk passionately about their work. The pupils appreciate how the adults tell them how well they are doing. They recognise that their teachers are always planning the next steps in their learning so that they can improve their work further. Parents are supportive of the school. One parent said, 'Each child's contribution is valued equally.'

The school promotes British values well. The elected school council is involved in making decisions about the school. It has recently organised a school disco and is developing new activities for the pupils to participate in at lunchtime.

The school's curriculum enables the pupils to develop their knowledge in history and geography. Pupils have researched different countries, including, for example, Australia and Ghana, to improve their knowledge of different cultures. One class had visited Eyam and pupils could re-tell facts about the Great Plague.

At the last inspection, the inspector asked the school to widen the use of communication symbols and other communication aids to improve pupils' understanding. Communication symbols are now used extensively throughout the school in lessons and on displays to ensure that all pupils can access the learning. In addition, the inspector asked you to improve the provision for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. You have reorganised the class structure to enable this group of pupils to engage more in their learning. You have also developed the curriculum to help promote pupils' physical development with support from a physiotherapist. In one lesson during the inspection, the pupils were encouraged to move when singing a nursery rhyme and to practise rolling on the floor. This group of pupils is making good progress over time.

The inspector also asked the school to improve governance. The governors now offer more support and challenge to school leaders. The governors have recently challenged school leaders about the teaching of science and reading, for example. This has led to the introduction of a new science curriculum. Staff have also recently completed a whole day's training on the teaching of reading. However, the leaders' action plan to further improve the school does not contain sharp enough success criteria by which governors can check to see whether the actions taken have been successful. I have asked you to review the school's action plan to enable governors to increase their level of challenge further.

I have also asked you and your team to review how the teachers check the amount of progress that pupils make and how teachers set targets for the pupils to reach. Currently, not all teachers take into account pupils' prior attainment to set sufficiently challenging targets. This slows the pupils' learning, particularly for the most able pupils. Furthermore, I have asked you to offer more challenging coursework in the sixth form to meet the needs of the most able.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff are highly vigilant and report any concerns they have about a pupil's well-being promptly. The school's record-keeping is detailed and shows the prompt actions that leaders have taken to address concerns. The family resource worker has developed good relationships with families to promote pupils' well-being through frequent phone calls and by attending appointments with the families to offer support. She has accessed funding through the Derbyshire Autistic Society and pupil premium funding to enable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to experience days out and residential trips to promote their independence.

The school works closely with a range of agencies, including those for social care and children's mental health, to ensure that pupils' needs are met. The staff receive regular training on safeguarding. They have completed training to help protect pupils from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. The staff have also been trained to administer medication to pupils who have complex and varied special educational needs and/or disabilities. A nominated governor checks the school's safeguarding procedures. All governors ask leaders regularly about safeguarding and check the school's annual audit of safeguarding, which is sent to

the local authority. The school has completed all the necessary checks on the adults who work and volunteer at the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The pupils say that behaviour is good at the school, and that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. The pupils' attendance is good. Pupils are proud of their school and of their achievements.

Inspection findings

- The headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and middle leaders are an effective leadership team. They have identified areas of the curriculum that needed to improve and have taken action to improve teaching and learning.
- Leaders identified that the teaching of reading could improve. All staff have received training on the teaching of phonics and other strategies intended to support pupils with their reading. Pupils are using their phonic knowledge well to sound out letters and are becoming more confident in blending letters to make words. In lessons, pupils were observed using these skills well in their reading and spelling.
- Pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties are supported well in their learning. Pupils exercised their fingers through manipulating modelling clay. The middle leader who has responsibility for this group of pupils has trained staff to promote pupils' physical development. Each pupil has a target, for example, to stand using a standing frame for five minutes. These targets are shared with the parents so they can help their child complete the exercises at home. The parents also provide feedback about how well their child has achieved the tasks. The pupils have made good progress. The impact of the activities has led to pupils' improved readiness for learning and increased their independence and ability to move around the classroom.
- Pupils' scientific knowledge is increasing through practical activities. I observed younger pupils learning about light and dark, and exploring how light makes a difference in a dark tent. The adults supported the pupils well and readily responded to pupils' non-verbal communication, praising the pupils for their physical movements.
- The leader with responsibility for pupils' communication needs has developed a range of strategies to support these needs. She has provided training in Makaton for both staff and parents to support those pupils who find verbal communication difficult. The school benefits from the expertise of the speech and language therapist. She has supported the staff to set communication targets for the pupils.
- However, the leader is aware that the teachers' assessment of the progress that the pupils are making in their communication skills needs to develop, to help ensure that pupils are making as much progress as they can.

- The staff use symbols well to support pupils' communication skills. Pupils observed had symbols to explain to them how to make a diya (lamp), as part of the school's Diwali day. In addition, adults prepared some pupils for lunch by giving them a choice between two objects that represented food. This helped the pupils realise that they could make a choice by indicating a preference.
- In the early years, the children's achievements across the curriculum are recorded in detail through photographs and observations by all staff who work in the classroom. One child recognised that his surname ended in the letter sound he was learning about. Another child knew that he lived in Great Britain. The teachers promoted the children's knowledge and understanding of the world through looking at Diwali celebrations. The children sang a song about Diwali enthusiastically and were fascinated by the smell of Indian sweets. The children make good progress from their starting points.
- The teachers' assessments of what the pupils can do are not used well enough to plan the next steps in the pupils' learning. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. The most able pupils told the inspector that the work can be too easy for them.
- In addition, the school has not worked with external partners well enough to check that the teachers' assessments are accurate. Consequently, the targets given to the most able pupils do not provide enough challenge and their progress slows.
- The students in the sixth form are becoming confident individuals. The school promotes the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students are aware of the actions of others. One student was observed thanking the pupils and staff who made a feast to celebrate Diwali. The students walk into the local town to go shopping and order food and drink to prepare them for independent living, accompanied by school staff. In mathematics lessons, students use the receipts to check that they have been given the correct change.
- The school's sixth-form curriculum does not provide enough opportunities, however, for the most able students to develop their key skills in English, mathematics and computing. This group of students does not make as much progress as they could.
- The school promotes students' personal development through allocating roles of responsibility within the school. These roles can involve supporting younger pupils with their reading or maintaining the school garden.
- Most students have the opportunity to take part in work experience in the sixth form, which prepares the students well for independent living. Placements include the students working at Barnardo's or at a local riding stables. Each student has access to impartial careers advice and each student has an individual learning plan that includes their aspirations for when they leave the school.
- The sixth-form leader ensures that the students are studying for qualifications related to their personal development. Some are also focused on courses related to specific skills, such as swimming and cooking. The school prepares students well for when they leave the school. The school remains in contact with students who have recently left the school, so that it can still offer support for students at college if necessary. School records show that all students who left the school in July 2016 have settled well into college.

- Pupils' behaviour is good. Established routines enables the pupils to feel secure, which helps to promote their learning. In the morning, pupils wait patiently for their turn to say 'Good morning.' A calm approach to managing pupils' behaviour enables all pupils to participate with the greeting, experiencing success.
- Incidents of fixed-term exclusions have reduced rapidly. Leaders closely analyse the possible reasons why pupils exhibit challenging behaviour. As a result, plans are put in place to reduce the likelihood of pupils repeating poor behaviour. These plans have helped reduce the number of incidents of challenging behaviour.
- The leaders use the pupil premium funding well to promote the learning of disadvantaged pupils. The funding has secured the services of a music therapist to enrich the curriculum and develop pupils' communication skills. It has also been used to fund a member of staff to teach sensory sessions. These sessions develop pupils' sensory processing skills, for example, by pupils focusing on a bubble tube. There is no difference in the amount of progress disadvantaged pupils make compared with that of other pupils in the school who have the same starting points.
- The sport funding premium has enabled pupils to participate in festivals and competitions with other special schools. Pupils have participated in gymnastics, dance and games activities. In addition, the school has linked with the local football club, which has provided training for the pupils to develop their skills to play football. The pupils' physical development has been promoted well.
- The local authority has led training for the governing body, which has increased the level of challenge that governors provide to leaders. The governors have observed the teaching and learning alongside the local authority adviser to improve their knowledge and understanding of the school. Minutes of governing body meetings show that the governors now ask leaders more probing questions about school improvement. However, the school's action plan does not contain clear enough success criteria by which governors can judge whether the actions taken by leaders have been successful. This has limited the level of challenge that the governors provide to leaders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers make better use of assessment to set more challenging targets for all groups of pupils and particularly the most able pupils
- the sixth-form curriculum provides sufficient opportunities for the most able students to develop their skills in English, mathematics and computing
- leaders' action plans contain measureable success criteria to enable governors to check whether the actions taken have been successful.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, the family resource worker, non-teaching staff, a group of pupils and the middle leaders. We spoke with parents, observed pupils at breaktime and listened to pupils read. We visited all classrooms, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' current work. I met with four governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body. I reviewed records about attendance and safeguarding. I studied your school development plan, your self-evaluation, your headteacher reports and the minutes of meetings of the governing body. The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website. I considered the views of parents whom we spoke to and the seven responses to the Ofsted free-text service. I also considered the eight responses to the pupil survey and the nine responses to the staff survey. The key lines of enquiry for this inspection focused on:

- the quality of leadership through the school, including governance
- the quality of teaching, particularly for reading and science, and for the most able pupils
- the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements
- the quality of the school's provision in the early years and in the sixth form.