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5 January 2017

Helen Ball  
Headteacher  
St Anthony's School  
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West Sussex  
PO19 5PA

Dear Ms Ball

### **Short inspection of St Anthony's School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 2016 with Jenny Boyd, 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 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A winning combination of deep knowledge of each pupil, outstanding teaching and assessment and a constant drive for improvement has assured the school's continued success and pupils' excellent progress.

You have developed an even stronger leadership team who work together cohesively to bring about continuous improvements, building on the recommendations from the last inspection. There is first-rate teamwork in the school, and communication between the different phases and with professionals outside the school is exemplary.

There is no complacency in the school. You and your team are constantly seeking to improve school systems and pupils' progress. You and your staff are excited about changes for the better and you all contribute to the school's well-deserved status as a source of expertise for special education.

The school has enhanced its strong reputation in the community by looking outwards and providing support and expertise to other schools, colleges and parents.

The school is extremely well regarded among parents and other professionals. You have ensured that staff know pupils and their families extremely well and that their needs are fully met. Staff respond quickly and knowledgeably to the changing profile of pupils admitted to the school and adapt their work to make certain that pupils progress extremely well.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Excellent communication and sharing of important information about pupils' needs and vulnerabilities ensure that pupils are safe in the school. Staff are highly trained to carry out their duties to safeguard pupils. Training in safeguarding is up to date, comprehensive and includes current guidance. Leaders of safeguarding are trained at a sophisticated level and have the seniority and expertise to carry out their roles extremely effectively.

Staff report concerns about pupils promptly and are alert to even the tiniest change in a pupil's behaviour or well-being because this may be a sign of potential harm. Staff possess a strong understanding of the complexities of different pupils' needs and also the difficulty that some pupils may have when communicating any worries.

Any reported concerns are taken seriously and acted on swiftly and effectively. As one member of staff said, 'We are not afraid to report concerns, however small. We would rather be wrong than right.'

Records of concerns about pupils and referrals to the local authority are comprehensive and kept securely. Risk assessments, care plans and positive handling plans for individual pupils contain helpful details and strategies for staff, all of which helps to keep pupils safe.

During the inspection, some minor issues related to the school's safeguarding policy were identified. These did not pose any risk whatsoever to the school's effective arrangement for safeguarding. Nevertheless, school leaders took immediate action and all issues were completely rectified by the end of the inspection.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils make excellent progress throughout the school. Children in the early years are supported extremely well with their speech and communication. Over time, pupils' progress goes from strength to strength. All pupils leave the school with appropriate skills and qualifications to help them take their next steps, whether towards further education, employment or supported living.
- Teaching is consistently excellent throughout the school. Teachers and assistants use their knowledge of pupils' abilities, needs and interests extremely well to plan learning. A strong focus on developing pupils' written and spoken language permeates all learning.
- Pupils complete work that is of excellent quality. Inspectors saw examples of accomplished and imaginative extended writing, which pupils took great care over, and which are testament to their immense progress since entering the

school. Pupils' art work demonstrates superb progress for the most proficient pupils, and those who find coordination more difficult. Pupils are adept at making good use of practical resources to help them learn, for example in mathematics.

- No time is wasted in lessons. Pupils are purposeful, productive and proud of their work. High expectations at every level ensure that pupils concentrate, work hard and are diligent. For those pupils who find learning and settling down in a classroom environment particularly difficult, inspiring resources and extra help soon get them back on track.
- Pupils read well and develop a real enjoyment of books through excellent use of published schemes, sharing books together as classes and through the well-stocked library.
- School leaders encourage staff to do research and study education and cognition at a high level. Effective practical strategies for teaching are based on a deep knowledge of how pupils who are autistic or have speech and language difficulties learn and make progress.
- Staff development is a major priority of the school and one of the keys to its success. Teaching assistants are encouraged to take on specialisms and many become 'associate teachers' because of the skills and knowledge they acquire. Staff are encouraged to study and research for further degree qualifications. Leaders of teaching and learning in the main school and the Support Centre are experts in their different fields and provide a wealth of experience and energy that keeps the school dynamic and looking forward.
- Pupils behave extremely well in and out of lessons. They are unfailingly polite and friendly with adults, and also form strong friendships with each other. Instances of deliberate bullying or unkindness are rare. The few incidents of challenging behaviour arising from anxiety are dealt with very well, with physical intervention seldom needed.
- Pupils' school lives are full of enriching opportunities to celebrate festivals, take part in cultural and sporting activities and learn about the world outside the school. For example, the active school council is provided with a dedicated budget to manage, which members use extremely well to improve activities. Similarly, pupils run the school tuck shop as paid employment to help them learn about work skills and running a business.
- Pupils' conduct is excellent because there are such well-established routines and expectations. Pupils move around the site between lessons calmly and play and socialise happily at lunchtimes and breaktimes. Even though the school has expanded greatly over the last few years, classrooms and corridors are kept extremely tidy. Rooms are well appointed and pupils take care of the environment. Appealing displays of school activities, art work and photographs of pupils succeeding and enjoying themselves fill the school. Equally, for those pupils who find too many displays distracting and over-stimulating, classroom areas are deliberately calming and spacious.
- The vast majority of parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and what it offers and are full of praise for how their children make excellent progress. A very small number of parents who contributed to Parent View indicated that they thought communication between the school and home could be improved. However, during the inspection there was no evidence of weak communication.

- The Support Centre is a superb resource. It caters extremely well for pupils who have the most complex difficulties with social communication and for those who need a temporary boost to their confidence and ability to learn. Carefully structured programmes designed by therapists and specialist staff help pupils to communicate more clearly and to manage their anxieties. In the Centre, pupils are tracked and monitored closely, with a view to returning them to the main school as soon as possible. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils and work tirelessly to remove barriers to learning and success.
- School leaders have rightly embraced the opportunity to develop their own scheme of assessment. An impressive system is now in place which is precisely tailored to what pupils need to learn in order to make progress. The system enables teachers and assistants to track each pupil's steps of progress and set challenging targets for them to meet. Although it is early days, the new assessment system is already leading to even better rates of progress for pupils and also improving their own understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Leaders are sensibly redesigning the curriculum for older pupils. Plans are being developed which are tailored wisely to developing more employment and life skills, but without lowering expectations or losing the breadth of subjects and topics offered to pupils. In typical fashion, leaders and staff are excited by the changes they are planning and are using their considerable expertise to make sure that it is the right course of action for the pupils. Leaders are also planning a meticulous evaluation process to make sure that the new curriculum is successful.
- Leaders of other special schools, mainstream schools and colleges nearby and further afield regard the school as an excellent source of help and expertise and regularly commission leaders and staff to support them. The school has recently acquired 'teaching school' status and the headteacher is a national leader of education. The school is also part of a group of special schools locally that provides support for mainstream schools and parents of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is also commissioned by a local further education college to support older learners who have additional needs.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff and leaders further extend their outreach work with other schools, colleges and professionals
- the new curriculum for older pupils and the new scheme of assessment are fully established and enhance pupils' progress and preparation for their next steps.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Inspectors focused on the following key aspects of the school's work:
  - whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective
  - how school leaders have responded to the recommendations for improvement from the last inspection
  - how well teaching staff, assistants and leaders are being developed
  - whether the outstanding teaching, learning, assessment and outcomes for pupils have been sustained and further improved
  - how well pupils are prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Inspectors observed learning in all phases across the school and the Support Centre. They talked to pupils, heard some read and looked at their work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff and members of the governing body.
- A range of documentation was reviewed, including information about pupils' progress and the school's information about teaching, learning and assessment.
- Inspectors took into account 73 responses to the staff questionnaire and 16 responses to Parent View.
- Inspectors checked the school's child protection records and safeguarding procedures.