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Mrs Karen Grist
Interim CEO and Principal
St John's School (Brighton)
Firle Road
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Dear Mrs Grist

Short inspection of St John's School (Brighton)

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Clare Gillies, 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 January 2017.

This school continues to be good.

You, the leadership team and the governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together you work effectively towards your common goal, to secure the best possible outcome for each individual pupil. To this end, staff work tirelessly to plan and deliver personalised programmes of study that allow pupils to make good progress from their starting points.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the effectiveness of the school. All of those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, believe their children are making good progress. As one parent said: 'This school changes children's lives forever. Dreams not only come true, but are made bigger and better.'

The multi-disciplinary approach to learning at the school continues to flourish under your leadership. An excellent example is the 'Therapy Enterprise Project', which links pupils' sensory and therapy needs to their learning. Pupils develop practical, work-related business skills, while drawing on their expertise as people who have sensory-processing issues. You rightly want to build on the success of the project by giving greater focus to a wider number of community ventures. You have identified the need to help pupils apply the skills they now use consistently in school when out in the community.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to build on the strengths of teaching by, for example, helping learners to make more choices about their learning; developing

how you help teachers improve their practice; and developing how you support pupils with their reading. With very effective support from other leaders, your work to tackle these issues has been effective.

Pupils receive regular and useful feedback about how to improve their work. There are effective mechanisms through which teachers track pupils' progress in lessons and over time. Your regular and targeted monitoring of teaching and learning has ensured that staff receive timely and developmental feedback. The cycle for improving teaching has helped to refine how staff plan for and deliver lessons that meet the needs of each individual. Consequently, for those pupils who are able, they now regularly make informed choices about their learning.

The whole-school 'literacy strategy', led by the senior teacher, has resulted in improvements to the teaching of reading. Many pupils now read well and for pleasure, as well as to support their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, other leaders and all staff know the pupils exceptionally well. Pupils are cared for and protected with compassion. Pupils report that they feel safe and happy. This is reflected in pupils' very high standards of behaviour in lessons and excellent conduct around the school.

You have nurtured a culture where staff work together diligently to protect the welfare of pupils. There are effective relationships with local authorities who place their children in your care. Leaders ensure that staff have undertaken all relevant and statutory training. Consequently, staff respond appropriately and swiftly to concerns. Policies and practices meet statutory requirements, including changes following the amendments to 'Keeping children safe in education' that were made in 2016. Appropriate checks are made when new staff are appointed and recorded on the single central register.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors focused on leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school, how well the area for improvement from the last inspection had been tackled, safeguarding arrangements at the school, the quality and consistency of outcomes for pupils, and the quality of 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school are accurate. There are established systems and processes that leaders follow to check learning and teaching and other areas of the school's work. For example, leaders use performance management systems effectively to evaluate where there are strengths in provision and where improvements are needed. Consequently, leaders' analysis of where there are strengths and areas for development are astute and based on sound evidence. Plans for improvement are sensibly focused on priority areas, with evidence of where this has led to better provision overall. For example, in July, leaders rightly analysed that the teaching of mathematics could be stronger. Strategies employed to tackle this have led to a significant

improvement in pupils' learning of mathematical concepts.

- Governance is strong. Governors manage their work effectively and are clear about where there are strengths in provision, such as in safeguarding and in the monitoring of teaching and learning, and where further attention is needed. Governors' knowledge of the school helps them to ask pertinent and challenging questions of leaders, holding them to account to improve provision further.
- Leaders use a wide range of systems to track pupils' progress carefully. For example, pupils' progress is tracked against their individual education plan targets, their progress academically and in the ways pupils' behaviour improves over time. However, new systems to track pupils' academic progress have proved more beneficial for teachers to identify where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge. Leaders have yet to find a way to synthesise all of the information they have about pupils to help them identify precisely where learning could be even better.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. The progress they make in their personal development and behaviour is particularly strong. Excellent relationships and robust systems for managing behaviour help pupils to settle quickly when they join the school. They then learn quickly how to manage their own needs over time. Pupils' academic progress is strong. They benefit from bespoke programmes of study that focus on their personal interests, engendering pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Pupils of differing abilities receive lessons that are tailored to their specific needs. Leaders have rightly identified that more could be done to challenge the most able by strengthening the opportunities for reasoning in lessons.
- 16 to 19 study programmes are particularly effective at preparing students for the next stage of their education, employment or training. Careers advice is a strength. As with the curriculum, careers advice is designed around learners' specific needs and interests. The transition to the next stage of pupils' education, employment or training is managed exceptionally well. Many go on to study at St John's College in Brighton, led by the same governing body and principal. However, leaders ensure that when this is not appropriate, they identify other opportunities and prepare pupils diligently. The bespoke approach seen here is equally as effective as in the school. For example, one of the most able pupils will be accessing a science, technology, engineering and mathematics course, commonly referred to as a STEM course, in collaboration with the University Technical College in Newhaven.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- build on the excellent enterprise elements of the curriculum so that pupils have greater opportunities to apply the skills they learn in school in the local community
- strengthen teaching further so that the most able are more regularly challenged to think for themselves

- pull together systems for tracking pupils' progress so that the process is more succinct and supports improvement planning further.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the head of education, a senior teacher, the chair of governors, leaders responsible for safeguarding, the occupational therapy team and a group of pupils. I spoke to a consultant from East Sussex County Council who works closely with the school. Inspectors visited four lessons, most accompanied by the deputy headteacher, to observe teaching and to talk to pupils about what they were learning. Inspectors also considered the responses of 11 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as five responses to the free-text service. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings, monitoring information and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.