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Mrs Helen Farnell
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Dear Mrs Farnell

Short inspection of Penrose School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Karen Gannon, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2016, you have had a very positive impact on the school. You lead the school well. This is reflected in staff and parents' feedback, both in discussions and through the Ofsted questionnaire. Staff commented on your drive and the improved morale in school, as well as the challenge you have provided. You have assessed accurately the strengths and areas for improvement in the school and prioritised what needs to be done. Rightly, you have focused on tightening systems for safeguarding and improving behaviour. As a result, the school now has a good range of systems that support pupils to behave well, and which ensure that they are safe. Parents and pupils confirmed that the school is a safe place to be. Parents were very positive about the improvements since your arrival, and spoke of the 'care, consideration and drive' that you and your staff demonstrate. They particularly value how well they are kept informed about their child's progress.

Your inclusive approach has resulted in a team of staff who have a clear understanding of developments and are fully involved in moving the school forward. Your focus on empowering staff is evident in the confidence of your senior leadership team in leading meetings with inspectors and explaining the improvements that have taken place and their plans for the future. Since the last inspection, the roles of subject leaders have developed well, particularly in English

and mathematics. Your desire to develop staff's skills is evident in your plans for a new leadership structure which extends the role of middle leaders. You have made good use of consultants to coach and support leaders and staff to develop their skills and expertise. Staff say they have very much appreciated the opportunities to visit, and learn from, good and outstanding schools, locally and nationally. The process for managing staff's performance has been improved and is far more rigorous, holding staff more closely to account for pupils' progress.

The school has responded quickly to the changing needs of pupils. Effective analysis of pupils' personal and social skills and high-level training have equipped staff to understand, and work effectively, in supporting pupils to behave well. The school is a positive, calm environment, where staff know the pupils very well and step in quickly to help any pupil who needs support.

In lessons, pupils concentrate well. They have very positive attitudes to learning, and talk about subjects such as art, physical education and topic, which they clearly enjoy. Pupils' targets ensure that the vast majority make good progress. Teachers have developed their skills well in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. Resources are used effectively and support staff are managed well so that pupils are engaged. Sometimes, work could be more challenging, particularly for the most able pupils. You have identified that assessment procedures need to be more precise. Work has already started on sharpening systems for assessing pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. You, your governors and your staff take their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils very seriously. As a result, safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The checks on staff recruitment are robust, and records are meticulous. Staff are well trained in all aspects of child protection and safeguarding and know how to respond to concerns. They are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe, and understand how to keep safe, from risks in school. Risk assessments of activities in school and off-site have been reviewed and are robust in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Pupils talk knowledgeably about keeping themselves safe, especially when using information technology.

Record keeping for pupils at risk of harm and in need of protection, or who are being supported because of concerns, are well maintained and of a high quality. When disclosures are made or safeguarding concerns identified, timely referrals are made to children's social care or the designated lead for safeguarding in the local authority. You and your team work very closely with families, identifying those that may need extra support and arranging regular visits from the family support team. This level of support for families has had a very positive impact on reducing the number of referrals of concern.

Inspection findings

In agreement with you, this inspection focused on the progress of pupils and the role of governors in monitoring the school's work, improvements to teaching, learning and assessment, the support provided for pupils' personal and social development and the effectiveness of safeguarding.

- The vast majority of pupils make good progress. Pupils make particularly good progress in their communication skills. The well-established assessments of pupils' communication skills ensure that they have access to a range of resources and approaches to support them. Pupils work hard in lessons and have produced detailed work in topic. The thematic curriculum is well planned by teachers and captivates pupils' interest.
- The school is aware that a small number of disadvantaged pupils did not do as well as their peers last year. You have ensured that the school's planning for the use of the pupil premium funding this year is far more detailed and provides a clearer overview of the impact of spending.
- Governors hold leaders to account well. They consider they now have a good understanding of all that goes on in the school because they receive very detailed information from you. They are fully involved in decision making, for example in supporting the purchase of a new system for tracking pupils' progress. This will support the school in the overhaul of its assessment processes. You have identified that systems need to be better in tracking pupils' progress and ensuring that there are clearer expectations of what pupils can achieve so that all make the best possible progress.
- Teachers' expertise in autism is evident, and class routines are well established. For example, pupils settle quickly at their workstations and make good progress in completing the set tasks. Lessons are lively and well-resourced to support learning and make it interesting. Good teamwork ensures that staff work competently with groups of pupils. However, work is not consistently matched to the different ability groups in the class and targets are not routinely challenging, especially for the most able pupils. As a result, progress for the most able pupils is not always fast enough.
- Pupils' personal and social development is supported very well, and behaviour is good. Training has provided staff with a clear understanding of the different needs of pupils and how best their personal and social development can be promoted. Staff know pupils well, and there is a very nurturing ethos throughout the school. Pupils are supportive of each other, and behaviour in and around school is very orderly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new assessment arrangements are used effectively to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress
- teachers consistently set challenging targets that promote good achievement, particularly for the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascal
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, your senior leaders joined me and the team inspector to observe learning in classrooms. I met with two governors and the team inspector and I held a range of meetings with your senior leaders. We looked at pupils' books, folders and learning records covering a wide range of subjects. Discussions were held with a number of staff and four parents. The team inspector and I observed break and lunchtimes, and held informal discussions with pupils throughout the day. Three parental and 27 staff responses to the Ofsted questionnaire were scrutinised, as were three free-text messages.

Meetings were held with the designated safeguarding lead, and I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan, safeguarding and child protection records and the school's self-assessment information. The school's single central record and supporting documentation were scrutinised.