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Mrs Christine Gayler  
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Dear Mrs Gayler

### **Short inspection of Norman Gate School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 2017 with Christine Bulmer, 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 June 2013.

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

Senior leaders and governors have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your clear and ambitious vision for pupils to be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens is apparent throughout the school and nursery.

You have very ably built upon the school's many strengths, noted at the last inspection. In particular, pupils continue to make rapid progress from their diverse starting points and the ways teachers personalise learning remain exceptional. The previous inspection suggested that the school's most-able pupils should be further challenged in their lessons. Staff responded by ensuring that these pupils have a regular opportunity to work together as a group. In class, teachers skilfully support the different talents that pupils have in particular subject areas, such as in art or computing. The adaptations for some of your most-able pupils now extend beyond the school, where teachers judge this to be appropriate, which means that a few individual pupils join in with mathematics or physical education lessons at a mainstream school.

Your staff are justifiably proud of the richness of the school's curriculum, which is enhanced by regular use of the school's extensive and well-equipped outdoor environment. Interesting visits, such as a recent residential visit to an activity centre for Years 5 and 6, as well as visitors to the school, provide memorable experiences for pupils to make learning come alive. Staff know each pupil as an individual and tailor teaching, learning and the environment to suit every child's needs. They

enthusiastically support pupils to master important life skills, as well to make academic gains.

Pupils develop self-awareness and confidence, as well as the ability to communicate their feelings, as they move through the school. Teachers have helpfully prepared the current Year 6 pupils to be positive about moving into secondary school by giving them strategies to express their thoughts and emotions.

The school's pupils have complex needs, which often include a social, emotional or behavioural aspect, along with a communication difficulty. You are aware from the feedback that pupils give staff that they worry about other pupils' behaviour more than any other aspect of school life. One quarter of parents responding to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, also shared concerns about behaviour. Consequently, inspectors looked carefully at this aspect of the school's work. We saw that pupils are respectful of each other and that relationships with all adults are warm. Every pupil is supported to try his or her best to keep to the school's rules irrespective of their special educational need. Staff are relentless in their work to improve pupils' social, emotional and behavioural skills. Teaching and support staff use their considerable expertise to understand pupils' needs so as to prevent incidents. When behaviour requires more careful management, as it sometimes does, this support is given skilfully. Staff work with parents and other agencies to adjust the support that they give. Senior leaders also work with individual parents to understand their own child's behaviours and those of others in the school, as well as offering parents training to understand autistic spectrum disorder.

The large majority of parents responding to the survey, those who spoke in person to inspectors and who have recently communicated directly with the school could not speak too highly of Norman Gate. One parent spoke for many by saying, 'What [the school] offers to children who are struggling in a variety of ways is unbelievable. Each child is valued for his/her own differences and attributes.' Inspectors agree with this view.

The school continues to be commissioned by Hampshire local authority to provide outreach advice and support for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in other schools and early years settings, including for parents in their own homes. Evaluations show how much this is appreciated. You are also committed to work supportively with other schools, both mainstream and special, in formal and informal arrangements. You prioritise visits to other schools both to share expertise and to gather further ideas.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding is everyone's concern. The school's designated safeguarding lead provides staff with comprehensive training. Staff are aware that the pupils placed at the school are vulnerable because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. As one of them said, 'Keeping children safe is the most important thing we do.' As a result, pupils are well supervised by the teaching staff at all times of the day.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Referrals to outside agencies, including for early help, are timely and appropriate. Wherever practical, additional support is given to pupils and their families so that the best outcome can be found. This might include, for example, collecting a pupil from home, pupils having breakfast on arrival at school with a member of the support staff, or helping a pupil to manage his or her personal hygiene.

Pupils told inspectors that they learn to keep themselves safe and they know who to go to in school if they have a problem. Symbols on the playground help pupils during breaktime to communicate a need for help to a member of staff or to express how they are feeling. Older pupils learn how to take care when they access the internet.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, inspectors took account of whether, as a result of the school's provision, pupils' outcomes and their personal development and well-being remain outstanding.
- Inspectors saw how hard pupils work. As a result of carefully prepared and motivating learning tasks, pupils concentrate, listen and respond to adults' questions and directions. Pupils have regular and appropriate feedback about their work, which helps them to improve. Not a moment of learning time is wasted, including at lunchtime, where 'table targets' support pupils' social development.
- Pupils' engagement in learning and their overall development is helped by the school's consistent approach to communication. Picture exchange and signing strongly support pupils from the time that they start at the school right through until they leave, by which time their communication is verbal. Pupils enjoy learning sounds, along with signs, to help them to develop early reading and writing skills.
- Teachers rigorously track pupils' progress from their starting points in all subjects and areas of learning, which includes personal and social development. The school's approach to assessment and tracking is accurate and deeply embedded. Teachers use this information to identify the precise steps of progress that will help pupils to achieve their challenging targets. The school's tracking information shows that almost all pupils make expected progress to meet these targets, and many make exceptional progress. Leaders carefully monitor and regularly discuss each child's progress with class teachers. Additional support is given where pupils do not make the progress that is expected of them. This might include, for example, access to one of the school's many therapeutic interventions or a change of learning strategy.
- Pupils enjoyed talking about their many achievements. A Year 6 pupil proudly told an inspector, 'When I came into this class, I couldn't count to 20, now I can count to over 100.' At the end of the day Reception children readily shared, with just a little adult support, how their skilful cutting had helped them to make kites

to take home. Pupils develop self-esteem through regular and enjoyable activities such as horse riding or through their hands-on 'forest school' lessons. A Year 4 pupil explained that each year their learning 'becomes more challenging'.

- You encourage pupils to think of themselves engaging in future work that will provide them with a positive quality of life. For example, a 'young enterprise' project enables pupils to apply for funds to develop an idea, such as an item to make and sell, and then to set up a mini-business. Pupils also have the opportunity to apply for jobs around the school for which they have an interview, such as to be a gardener. The opportunities that you provide also develop pupils' resilience, enabling them to cope with disappointment, such as when more than 30 pupils applied for eight school council places.
- All staff appreciate the very strong emphasis that leaders place on professional development because it aims to have a direct impact on pupils' experiences of learning. One staff member summed up the overwhelming support for the school's leadership by saying, 'The emphasis on doing absolutely everything we can for each and every child, down to the very smallest detail, never ceases to amaze and to inspire me.' It is precisely this approach that results in the outstanding progress that pupils make.
- Staff offer regular opportunities to meet parents and prepare detailed annual reports. These are informative and describe the many memorable experiences that pupils have enjoyed, as well as the work that they have covered across the year. Parents also engage in the annual review process for education, health and care plans. However, formal reports and home-school books do not capture and celebrate pupils' small but uplifting successes in the same enthusiastic way that inspectors both saw and heard.
- You and your teachers use pupils' progress information rigorously to unpick where further improvements can be made. You collectively monitor teaching and learning in classrooms, looking at pupils' progress and the breadth of their learning and developmental experiences. This work helps you and your senior leaders to identify further improvements as part of the school's continuous drive to do the best it can for every pupil.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- communication with parents improves so that they all have confidence in the school's work and increased opportunities to celebrate their child's successes.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Jacobs

## **Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you, the deputy headteacher and a mixed group of teaching staff. We visited all classes with leaders, where we briefly observed learning. We saw pupils at lunch and at play and we spoke to pupils as we visited the classrooms and playground. We randomly selected some pupils to discuss progress with teachers or with leaders and we looked at their workbooks. I met three members of the governing body and spoke to a representative of the local authority. The team inspector spoke to a group of staff to explore their opinions. I also considered 35 responses to the online staff questionnaire. The views of parents were gathered in discussions at the school gate and through 21 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. I also took into account the views of one parent who telephoned Ofsted. We analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and the school's safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.