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Ms Fiona Clark
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Dear Ms Clark

Short inspection of Uplands School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Jen Edwards, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team, in exceptionally close partnership with the chief executive officer, has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Under the school's inspirational leadership, no avenue is left unexplored to ensure that pupils receive the best education. You remain forward looking and continually seek innovative ways to improve further. Complacency is not an option for leaders or staff within the school. Staff know and understand pupils' needs superbly well. They very quickly build excellent relationships with pupils and their families; consequently, pupils make notable gains. Pupils describe how they are happy and enjoy their time in school. Indeed, pupils comment, 'This is a brilliant school; it is the staff that make it – they are amazing.'

You and your staff are tenacious and demonstrate a steadfast determination to provide the best quality of education and care for pupils. Staff welcome the high-quality training, coaching and mentoring they receive. As a result, staff, irrespective of their role, are highly skilled and provide an education which precisely meets the needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils flourish and make excellent progress from often extremely low starting points, both in their academic and personal development.

Plans for development demonstrate clearly a relentless drive for continuous improvement of this outstanding school, with an unrelenting focus to raise pupils' outcomes and aspirations further. For example, robust plans are in place to increase the number of academic qualifications achieved by your most able pupils and further build upon the recent success in pupils achieving GCSEs.

The only improvement point arising from the last inspection was to develop stronger links with businesses and firms in the community to widen opportunities for work-related qualifications. You have tackled this with aplomb, with impressive outcomes. Pupils are visibly excited by the wide range of opportunities they get. For example, during the inspection, a visit was made to one of the Uplands charity shops. During this time, pupils were observed sorting stock with confidence and flair. They were able to use their knowledge of money effectively, knowing the cost of products and accurately calculating the change required. Such opportunities provide pupils with the skills they will need for their future. As a result, no pupil leaves Uplands School without moving into further education, training or employment.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive and deeply appreciate the quality of education and care their child receives. They speak highly of the support and guidance they and their children receive. Comments such as, 'This is a gateway for our children's future', 'This is a wonderful school – nothing is too much trouble and we would not go anywhere else', and, 'I can see a future for my child', are typical of the responses received.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe; the effectiveness of leaders to ensure that pupils receive an effective standard of education and care; how teaching promotes good learning; and the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting pupils' academic and social development in preparing them for their future destinations. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, other leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

You and your staff consider the safeguarding of pupils to be of the utmost importance. The nature of your school means that all pupils are vulnerable in a variety of ways. You demonstrate a dogged determination to ensure that processes, systems and checks to safeguard pupils are fit for purpose and continually monitored to ensure that they continue to keep pupils safe. There is a strongly embedded culture of safety and security which is palpable throughout the school. You consider safeguarding to be 'everybody's responsibility' and there is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from all potential risks. You ensure that staff receive high-quality training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe. This provides them with the knowledge and skills to spot concerns and take rapid action with confidence.

Leaders, including governors, clearly understand the importance of recruiting safely. There are rigorous recruitment procedures to ensure that all staff are carefully vetted prior to starting employment to confirm that they are suitable to work with children. Risk assessments are in place for activities undertaken and for individual pupils. Leaders check these regularly to make sure that they remain fit for purpose.

Relationships between staff and pupils are impressive. Consequently, pupils report that they are happy and feel safe during their time in school. They describe how staff look after them and support them in tackling any of their worries or concerns: 'I would talk to an adult if I didn't feel safe.'

Inspection findings

- Leaders, including governors, continue to be highly ambitious for Uplands School. You and your leaders demonstrate a determination to make sure that the school continues to provide outstanding education and care. You have extremely high expectations which your highly skilled and committed staff share. Leaders carefully and routinely monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Robust performance management, coupled with carefully planned and effective professional development, ensure that staff have the skills required for their role. Nevertheless, you are not shy to challenge where practice does not meet your exacting standards, which ensures that pupils consistently receive high-quality learning opportunities.
- Governors have an impressive breadth and depth of experience and expertise. This enables them to provide an excellent balance of high-quality support and guidance and, when required, rigorous challenge to hold leaders firmly to account.
- Detailed improvement planning clearly reflects leaders' resolve and desire for further driving forward and increasing outcomes for pupils. Such plans clearly reflect the school's accurate self-evaluation of its performance.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is of a consistently high level. All staff know each individual pupil exceptionally well. Staff carefully plan learning activities to meet the needs of each pupil. This enables pupils to learn well and succeed.
- Staff carefully track progress lesson by lesson and day by day. For example, staff are constantly checking on what pupils know, can do and understand. This allows them to modify questions or activities to build upon pupils' knowledge and understanding. This was exemplified in a mathematics lesson on shape and position. Skilful questioning, coupled with careful observation of pupils' responses and actions, allowed staff to adapt the learning to meet pupils' needs precisely. Consequently, pupils made strong progress, proudly demonstrating their understanding.
- The curriculum is inspiring. It is carefully personalised to meet the needs of each pupil. There is a strong focus on the core skills of reading, writing and number alongside other academic areas such as humanities and the arts. Pupils have access to a wide range of enrichment activities, which include music, sports,

land-based studies, life skills and horse riding. During the inspection, inspectors viewed the choir and art club. It was impressive to see pupils so totally immersed in their chosen activity and so proud of their accomplishments.

- Through looking at pupils' work and viewing progress information, it is evident that there are no differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers. However, you have correctly identified the need to raise further the academic success of your most able pupils in order that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils fulfil their academic potential.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you and your senior leaders. Together, we talked about the improvements that have been made since the last inspection. We observed the start of the day when pupils first arrive in school. We carried out a 'learning walk' through classes, accompanied by you or your senior leaders. We also held discussions with four governors and held meetings with other members of staff. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority. We talked to pupils to gather their views.

We scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence, including information on pupils' outcomes, the school's self-evaluation, governing body meeting minutes, and records relating to the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, behaviour, attendance and the safeguarding of pupils.

We spoke to parents during the day and took into account other correspondence received during the inspection. We considered the 28 responses to the online survey Parent View, and 12 free-text messages were also taken into account.