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Mrs Angela Wellman
Headteacher
Grove Park School
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Dear Mrs Wellman

Short inspection of Grove Park School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 2017 with Lesley Corbett, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead the school with determination and passion. Your working partnership with the deputy headteacher and other senior members of staff is having a very positive impact on improving provision. Collectively, staff work well together as a team across all three sites of the school. Recent changes in roles and responsibilities of leaders, as well as the appointment of additional staff, have been well managed. The capacity created by these changes is already having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Classroom visits showed the school to be a happy place, where pupils enjoy learning and make good progress. This includes pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Your 'priority needs targets' for each pupil ensure that staff are constantly addressing the factors needed to mitigate barriers to learning. As a result, pupils show good attitudes towards coming to school and engage readily with staff.

Despite their complex needs, pupils were keen to share their work with inspectors. Your opinion, expressed during our initial meeting, that inspectors would witness 'enthusiastic classes' was certainly borne out in reality. One classroom visit was memorable for the humour generated, as one pupil gleefully tricked me as he introduced himself, much to the delight of his classmates and staff in the room.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school including good leadership, management and governance; pupils making

good progress with their English, mathematics and communication skills; and outstanding behaviour. They also identified the need for leaders to ensure that support staff were used in a more consistent way to support learning, and that access to specialist practical facilities should be enhanced as far as possible. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. Classroom visits showed that teaching and support staff work effectively together to promote learning. It is also clear that the school's curriculum now offers appropriate opportunities for pupils to engage in practical activities, both on and off site.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the process of self-evaluation. You were able to explain clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the priorities for development, including improving the school's phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) provision. You also explained how the school's work to reduce the high rates of persistent absence of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is beginning to make a difference. However, you agreed with me that more needs to be done to improve the attendance of this vulnerable group. You also recognise that systems to monitor pupils' progress need to be refined. This will enable leaders and governors to have a more realistic understanding of pupils' outcomes, particularly their academic progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Staff and governors take their collective responsibility to keep pupils safe seriously. Policies, procedures and systems are robust and day-to-day routines are comprehensive. The single central record of staff checks is sound. Staff training is thorough, up to date and commensurate with the level of responsibility of individual staff.

The school's culture to protect children and keep staff and pupils safe is well developed. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they know who to talk to if they have any worries. All of the parents who used the online parent questionnaire, Parent View, believe that their children are safe at the school. This was also the case with the 26 members of staff who completed the online staff questionnaire.

Inspection findings

- Most pupils are making good or better progress in a range of subjects from their different starting points. This is true in all phases of the school. Classroom visits and the scrutiny of pupils' work also showed that most-able pupils are challenged at an appropriate level. This is particularly the case in key stage 3.
- School leaders track the progress of pupils well, although they know that there is still work to do to ensure that their evaluation of pupils' outcomes is as accurate as it could be. Progress meetings are held regularly. These allow leaders and teaching staff to assess pupils' all-round development, as well as their academic outcomes.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. It offers rich experiences and frequently provides opportunities for practical learning. Much of the curriculum is

individualised and bespoke in nature. This includes the secondary phase and sixth form, where work experience and college placements supplement students' day-to-day experiences. Pupils enjoy the extra-curricular aspects of the wider curriculum, including tae kwon do, dance and choir clubs. They also appreciate the out-of-school learning they undertake, including residential trips for outdoor adventurous activities.

- The school provides well for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Leaders and governors monitor closely all aspects of progress made by this relatively small group of pupils. As a result, most make similar progress to other pupils in the school, while some make even better progress than their peers. However, leaders know that the rates of persistent absence among this group are too high and have already begun to address the problem successfully. Early indications show a fall in the rates of absence of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders know that sustained success in reducing the rates of absence of all pupils is key to enabling them to realise their full potential.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to assess and monitor pupils' progress are further refined, so that leaders' self-evaluation of pupils' outcomes is more realistic
- the school's provision for teaching phonics is strengthened by ensuring that key staff have access to appropriate training and resources
- rates of persistent absence of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds reduce more rapidly than at present.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited classrooms on all three sites of the school, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and assessing the quality of pupils' work. Inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders during classroom visits. Inspectors assessed pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in classrooms and as they moved around the school. Meetings were held with leaders; the vice-chair of the governing body, accompanied by one other governor; and two groups of pupils. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

Inspectors took into account 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, and accompanying free-text responses, as well as an email and letter submitted by a parent. Inspectors considered 26 replies to the staff questionnaire. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including policies, pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, notes of visits by the local authority, and minutes of governing body meetings.