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Ms Jacqui Warne
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Warne

Short inspection of Bidwell Brook School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017 with Paul Winterton, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your partnership with a local similar school helps to strengthen the school's work. Governors are skilled and knowledgeable. They work effectively to make sure that the school continues to improve.

Your vision, 'everyone will be the best they can be, no-one is excluded, everyone has a voice', welcomes visitors and is displayed across the school. The vision provides a clarity of purpose and describes your high expectations to everyone involved.

Pupils are encouraged to describe their aspirations for the future, and staff work hard to match learning experiences to these aspirations. Pupils have access to a wide range of curriculum activities both in school and outside school, including access to a rural curriculum. Pupils proudly talk of how much they enjoy their learning, and older pupils describe the success they achieve while on work experience.

Since you arrived, you have ensured that much of the work of the school has been strengthened. You show a real commitment to providing staff with high-quality professional development and to 'growing your own' teachers and leaders for the future.

An area for development at the previous inspection was to ensure that subject leaders support their colleagues by sharing best practice. Subject leaders now become 'experts in their field'. They research their areas of responsibilities and provide professional support for colleagues.

You are determined to empower others. You build successful staff teams who are clear about their roles and responsibilities and about how their team contributes to achieving the school's aims and current priorities. These team and subject leaders know that the next step is to evaluate exactly how their work is making a difference to outcomes for pupils.

You and your leadership team are relentless in developing positive partnerships with parents. As well as listening to parents' views about their own pupils, you use the themes from parents' comments to help inform the school strategic plan. All parents who expressed a view said that they would recommend the school to other parents. A typical comment from parents is: 'I am delighted at my daughter's progress. She has complex needs and her improvement has been incredible. She is very happy here.'

An important focus for the school is your work to introduce a new assessment system that draws together information about pupils' aspirations along with their health, social and education needs. This was an area for development in the previous inspection.

You and your leadership team have worked to ensure that information from regular reviews is shared and understood by staff as pupils move from one part of the school to the next. Information is also used to inform other professionals about pupils' needs. For example, there is strong communication with hospital staff for pupils who have periods of hospital care.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The designated lead for safeguarding, supported by a safeguarding team of deputies, carries out her work with diligence. She ensures that new staff have a wide range of safeguarding information when they join the school. Staff are given updates throughout the year, including any learning from serious case reviews that happen across the country.

The safeguarding team, which includes the school nurse, works effectively. Members meet often to look at any safeguarding issues arising, including checking that individual risk assessments are up to date with any new information about a pupil. Staff are vigilant and know how and when to report any concerns about a pupil's welfare or safety. A wide range of agencies are consulted in order to ensure that pupils receive the help they need, and this includes any pupils who are under long-term medical care. Governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding and provide appropriate checks to ensure that safeguarding practices and procedures are strong and continually improved.

Inspection findings

- We agreed some key lines of enquiry to explore during the inspection. The first was to look at the impact of joining the federation. One governing body oversees the work of both schools in the federation. You, as executive headteacher, lead both schools. Some senior leaders have responsibilities across both schools. Since joining the federation, governors have reorganised their structure so that they are more able to understand the work of the core leadership teams. This has helped governors to be knowledgeable about the work of the school. Minutes show that governors provide robust challenge to leaders about the school's effectiveness and particularly about pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders across the two schools in the federation work closely on areas such as comparing their assessments of pupils' work and sharing ideas about teaching and learning. Staff speak very positively about the professional support and challenge that the federation provides.
- The second line of enquiry was to look at whether teachers and support staff have the appropriate information they need to ensure that pupils can thrive and make the progress they should.
- You have introduced regular 'person-centred reviews' which involve a wide range of professionals along with parents and pupils. Teachers use pupils' health, social and educational needs information gathered at these events to plan the precise next steps for pupils and to assess their progress.
- This information helps you and your leadership team to see the progress that pupils are making across the school and how support strategies are helping pupils to improve. The assessment system is still being refined and embedded so that pupils understand their targets, and the targets inform the day-to-day practice in the classroom successfully.
- You ensure that the school's assessment information is carefully analysed so that groups of pupils' progress is evaluated and any lessons are learned. For example, you have recently looked closely at the range of therapies on offer to pupils. Work has started to evaluate the difference these therapies make to outcomes for pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's assessment system is fully embedded across the school so that pupils' targets are relevant to them and are used to inform teachers' day-to-day plans
- leaders and teams check and evaluate the impact of initiatives, strategies and therapies on outcomes for pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, both inspectors observed learning across the school accompanied by senior leaders. We talked to pupils and looked at work around the school. Several meetings were held with you and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with a small number of governors, including the chair of the governing body. We also met with core teams in the school to discuss the work that they do. A meeting was held with the designated lead for safeguarding and the governor lead for safeguarding.

A range of documents were scrutinised, including the improvement plan as well as documents related to the progress pupils make, along with documents related to safeguarding and attendance.

The 26 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, were taken into account as well as a letter and a telephone call from parents, which were both received during the inspection. The 22 responses to an online staff survey were looked at. A meeting was held with some pupil representatives from the school council.