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Mr John McPherson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr McPherson

### **Short inspection of Peak School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2017 with Janis Warren, 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. You lead the school well, putting the needs of the pupils at the centre of all your decisions. You have designed the 'P.E.A.K.' curriculum to meet the learning and therapeutic needs of the pupils. The staff are very attentive and caring. They know the pupils very well. Pupils make good progress and achieve externally accredited qualifications by the time they leave the school.

The school provides a range of therapies that enable pupils to develop their physical, social and emotional well-being. The school works with physiotherapists to train staff and deliver a bespoke programme to develop the pupils' abilities to sit, to stand and to walk. Pupils who have complex and varied special educational needs and/or disabilities have the opportunity to increase their confidence in a hydrotherapy pool. Pupils also take part in sensology. This is an opportunity for pupils to respond to different stimuli using their senses. Staff assess the pupils' learning. However, some of these assessments are not precise enough to track the small steps of progress that pupils are making or to plan the next steps.

A dance and music instructor, who supports children looked after, engages the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to respond to music and rhythm. This provides an opportunity for pupils who use a wheelchair to sit on a mat and feel the rhythm through different parts of their bodies. Staff are very attentive and encourage and praise the pupils for their efforts.

The school actively promotes involvement in the community to develop the pupils' social skills. Each week, all classes have the minibuss for a half a day. Pupils have the opportunity to go to the supermarket to buy products and make their own hot snack. Pupils visit the local country park. This provides a safer option for pupils who are anxious to be in an environment where there are people who they do not know. Pupils also have the chance to walk or travel by bus with staff to local libraries and the sports centre. Through these opportunities, pupils are more familiar with the local environment and are more confident socially.

Participation in outdoor pursuits is a weekly activity for most pupils at the school. Pupils participate in wheelchair abseiling, archery, canoeing, hiking and climbing. Pupils enjoy these activities and this supports their progress, both physically and socially. In addition you celebrate pupils' achievements out of school. One student, who plays the cornet in a local band, played in the school's Remembrance service.

At your last inspection, the inspectors asked you to give opportunities for teachers to share good practice and for teachers to set work at the right levels for pupils. Teachers have observed each other teach and are working more closely with teachers from other Derbyshire special schools. Teachers mostly match activities to the needs of the pupils. However, teachers do not consistently assess how well pupils are achieving to create enough information to plan the next steps. Consequently, pupils' progress can slow.

Inspectors also asked you to improve the curriculum for the children in the early years. Children have access to a range of activities across all the curriculum areas. Adults use symbols well to help children learn about emotions and days of the week. The children are encouraged to be independent. They self-register on the whiteboard, choosing a picture to show that they are present. Teachers assess against each curriculum area, but the assessments lack precision to show how well children have progressed in the different activities.

Finally, inspectors asked you to give more responsibility to subject leaders to lead their areas of responsibility across the school. The leaders of communication and behaviour recently led training and checked the impact of the training across the school. Consequently, the evidence you have collected shows that pupils are making better progress.

Following this inspection, I have asked that you ensure teachers are more precise in their assessments of how well pupils are learning to inform the pupils' next steps to accelerate their progress. I have also asked you and other leaders to be more precise in your guidance to teachers and non-teaching staff of how they can improve their practice. Finally, I have asked that you include measureable success criteria against each action for improvement in the school development plan to help the governors judge if actions taken have been successful or not.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders work very closely with a range of agencies to keep children safe. The school works closely with three named social workers from the local authority. This has enabled close and effective communication. If a concern is raised, you take prompt action to keep children safe. The record-keeping is detailed and arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose.

The school nurse leads on the administration of medicine. You have efficient systems in place for the administration of medicine both at school and for off-site activities. Consequently, pupils can access all the opportunities that are on offer within the curriculum.

The leadership and management of behaviour is excellent. You plan meticulously for pupils who are new to the school and who may have displayed very challenging behaviour at their previous schools. You find out as much information as possible about a new pupil to make your staff fully aware of the needs of each pupil. The pupils' behaviour plans are detailed and include specific strategies to support staff to manage challenging behaviour. As a result, new pupils settle in well. You have received a national award for this work. Members of staff who completed the staff survey said they feel very well supported by leaders to manage pupils' behaviour.

If a pupil displays challenging behaviour, the staff are very calm and de-escalate the situation quickly. After all incidents, the deputy headteacher reviews the actions that staff took and checks that the behaviour plans have been followed. The plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are still purposeful. In addition, you regularly monitor every pupil's behaviour, in detail. The monitoring reveals the frequency of any misbehaviour, the severity of the behaviour and where and when it happens. You act on these findings to reduce poor behaviour. As a result, the school has had no fixed-term or permanent exclusions for the past three years. The school is a calm environment where pupils are learning.

## **Inspection findings**

- The leader of communication is very proactive. She has led training for staff to improve how they communicate with the pupils. In lessons, the staff are trained to use Makaton and picture cards to communicate with pupils. They also use tablet computers to support some pupils who are non-verbal. This helps the pupils who speak very quietly, or not at all, to communicate their answers and demonstrate the progress they are making. Teachers promote pupils' speaking and listening skills by encouraging them to take turns to speak and to listen to each other. Teachers check that pupils are understanding what they have heard. Consequently, pupils' social skills are also being developed alongside their communication skills.
- The pupils enjoy reading. They use phonics well to make new words. Some pupils are encouraged to write the letters in sand before using a pencil. Teaching assistants are very skilled at engaging the pupils to repeat the sounds several times to embed the learning. If pupils lose focus, all adults continually re-engage

the pupils to complete the tasks. Adults hear pupils read regularly in school. Older pupils have the opportunity to read to younger pupils and model good reading. This builds their self-esteem and they enjoy this responsibility. Pupils make good progress in their reading.

- Teachers use the pupils' targets to mostly pitch the work at the right level for pupils. Younger pupils learned about positional language, for example 'under' and 'on', when they were throwing balls on a large parachute. This activity supported pupils' physical development by requiring some of them to stand for a sustained period of time. Pupils who use a wheelchair experienced rotation by having their wheelchairs spun around in the same activity. The older pupils are learning how to use public transport to travel to the local facilities. This is supporting their independent living skills. However, there are occasions where teachers introduce new vocabulary to pupils, but do not check that pupils understand the words. Therefore, pupils do not learn as well as they should. Furthermore, teachers' assessments of the pupils' learning do not consistently show how well the pupils have learned a new skill. Consequently, the assessments are not as useful as they should be to plan the pupils' next steps.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher regularly visit lessons to check pupils' learning. However, their feedback to teachers is not specific enough about how well pupils are learning. As a result, teaching does not consistently support all groups of learners to make accelerated progress.
- The school development plan includes appropriate areas for further improvement. However, the success criteria by which governors can judge if actions taken have been successful are not measurable. Therefore, this makes it more difficult for governors to challenge leaders effectively about the progress of pupils.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school development plan has measurable success criteria by which governors can judge if actions taken to improve the school have been successful
- teachers' assessments of pupils' abilities are more exact to record how well pupils are progressing and to inform the next steps of learning
- information provided to teachers is more precise to enable them to improve their practice further.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we met with you and your deputy. We met the leaders of communication and behaviour. We spoke with parents at the school and by telephone. We observed the arrival of pupils into school, visited classes and looked at pupils' work. We observed you and your deputy giving feedback to teachers following lesson observations. I spoke with the chair of the governing body on the telephone. We met with two groups of pupils and heard pupils read. You and I reviewed records about attendance and keeping children safe. We studied your school development plan, your self-evaluation and minutes of the governing body meetings. We looked at your documents relating to performance management. We considered the responses to the school's latest parents' survey and the one response to the Ofsted free-text service. We also considered the nine responses to the staff survey.