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Mrs Helen Todd
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Todd

Short inspection of The Lincoln St Christopher's School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018 with Mark Emly, 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been a number of changes of personnel in senior leadership positions in the last 18 months which has caused some anxiety among parents, carers and staff. However, you and your leadership team are successfully moving the school forward and building the capacity of middle leaders to help lead improvements. Standards have started to rise.

The governing body has responded positively to the warning notice issued by the local authority in December 2016, following concerns about the governors' ability to hold school leaders to account and to manage the school's finances effectively. Governors have undergone extensive training and now visit the school regularly and challenge school leaders about the standard of education and the school's finances. They recognise and appreciate that the new leadership team has increased the expectations of all staff to improve the progress of pupils. The local authority removed the warning notice last term.

Leaders recognised that the school's curriculum was not meeting the needs of pupils. Staff have developed new curriculum plans to suit the different needs.

As a result, more pupils are now making better progress and pupils' behaviour is improving. Pupils have the opportunity to study for a range of qualifications at

different levels, including GCSEs in a small range of subjects, to gain recognised qualifications to fulfil their potential.

Pupils who have severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders use pictures to help them communicate in their learning and to make choices. Detailed baseline assessments of the pupils' needs are made to enable teachers to set appropriate targets. Teachers focus their planning to support pupils to reach their targets and provide precise feedback to pupils about their progress. Where teaching is effective, pupils are highly engaged and make good progress.

The relationships between the pupils and staff are good. Pupils say that the staff are welcoming and get to know them well. Pupils are hardworking and take pride in their work. They cooperate well with each other and listen carefully to the ideas of others. Older pupils have high aspirations but are not clear how the school will guide and support their ambitions.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that the quality of teaching improves further. You have started to improve the quality of teaching; however, too many teachers have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Furthermore, your assessment information shows that pupils in the sixth form did not make the progress in English and mathematics they were capable of in the last academic year. The inspectors also asked you to develop the skills of children in the early years. Staff are skilled at using verbal communication appropriately to develop the communication skills of the children.

Finally, inspectors at the previous inspection asked leaders to update the information on the website about how the school spends the pupil premium funding. You have rectified this. However, the website does not contain all the information it should. The information on how the school has spent the catch-up funding for Year 7 pupils and the physical education and sport funding is not up to date. Also, there is insufficient information about the curriculum and the school's special educational needs information report is not available.

Safeguarding is effective.

The designated leaders for safeguarding know the pupils and families well. This enables the school to work well with families to provide appropriate support. The family liaison officer is highly knowledgeable about the services available in the local area. This ensures that there are effective links with external agencies to support the pupils and enables there to be a consistent approach to meeting pupils' needs at school, in their home and during respite care if used.

The school's record-keeping of concerns is detailed and informs the next steps to keep children safe. All incidents involving poor behaviour and physical restraint are recorded and analysed to try and reduce the number of future incidents. Pupils told the inspectors that behaviour is good around the school. Inspectors agree.

The governor responsible for safeguarding has received appropriate training for the role and checks the school's work regularly. The local authority audit tool for safeguarding has been completed to ensure that the school is meeting requirements. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils' attendance is much higher than the average for all special schools. Leaders closely monitor attendance and review all absences. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is low.

Inspection findings

- You, the acting executive headteacher and deputy headteacher, are an effective senior leadership team. Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. You are closely checking the progress the pupils make to ensure that they achieve as well as they can. The deputy headteacher is a good role model and is successfully developing the leadership capacity throughout the school. Middle leaders have been able to moderate their judgements of teaching and learning alongside the deputy headteacher, and have learned how to support teachers to improve further. Teaching is improving. The three phase leaders have welcomed the clear direction senior leaders have provided.
- You have rightly identified that the next tier of leadership which needs more support and direction is subject leadership. These leaders have not had the opportunity to raise standards until recently. Teachers' subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics, is not secure enough to challenge the most able pupils.
- Teachers receive regular training to help improve their practice. Although teaching is improving, too many teachers still underestimate the capabilities of pupils. Pupils told the inspectors that work is often too easy, particularly in mathematics. One pupil asked if more 'grown-up' work could be set. In lessons, teachers do not accurately assess pupils' abilities and do not sufficiently challenge the pupils to make them think harder. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows teachers provide insufficient challenge. The most able pupils, who have moderate learning difficulties, do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Students in the sixth form are developing their personal and social skills through, for example, learning to travel around the city using public transport. They are currently developing life skills by purchasing furnishings for the annex building, which they will then use to learn about independent living. The quality of teaching in this key stage is inconsistent. Students' misconceptions are not corrected well enough and they do not make the progress they should.
- The school organises for colleges to come into school to enable pupils and their parents to find out what courses are available for pupils after they have finished school. However, pupils do not know what further support is available from the school to help them achieve their ambitions, and often do not start thinking about their next steps until Year 11. Consequently, pupils may not be fully aware of all the different options available to them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations, including in the sixth form, are raised to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged and make better progress
- they develop the of role subject leaders to improve teachers' subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics
- they improve the effectiveness of careers advice and guidance to help pupils fulfil their aspirations
- they ensure that the school's website has all the required specified information for parents.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. 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, the acting executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the three phase leaders, four subject leaders, two governors, and members of the teaching and non-teaching staff. We observed pupils arriving at school in the morning, met with some parents, visited classes, spoke with pupils, and looked at pupils' current work and compared it to the targets in their education, health and care plans. We studied the school development plan, your self-evaluation, and the minutes of the governing body meetings. We reviewed records about behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. We considered the 30 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 22 responses to the Ofsted free-text service. We also considered the 47 responses to the pupils' survey and the 38 responses to the staff survey.