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Ms Sophie Clarke
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Clarke

Short inspection of Fordwater School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Gary Tostevin, Her Majesty's 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 2013.

This school continues to be good. Since you arrived in September 2017, and ably supported by the acting assistant headteacher, you have maintained and built on the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your unshakeable belief that all pupils deserve to be able to take their place in society as active, happy and productive citizens underpins your vision for the school. All staff in the school willingly play their part in creating an exceptionally warm and nurturing culture. As a result, pupils flourish and achieve well.

The majority of parents and carers appreciate all that the school does for their children. They reserve particular praise for the lengths to which staff go to overcome barriers to their children's learning and progress. One parent, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote: 'Fordwater is an exceptionally caring and safe environment for our daughter and we feel very privileged that she is a member of this school community. Everyone goes the second mile to provide appropriate and stimulating educational opportunities.'

Staff are proud to work at the school and feel that they get strong support from leaders to help them to improve their practice. You make sure that all staff benefit from appropriate training. Teaching and support staff welcome your openness and your willingness to listen to their ideas. They say that you have brought in positive changes, for example strengthening the recording of incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Subject leaders appreciate the opportunities they have to work with their counterparts in local special schools.

At the previous inspection, many strengths were identified. The lead inspector highlighted the effectiveness of teaching and leadership in helping pupils to achieve

well, in particular in the early years. In addition, inspectors concluded that pupils made excellent progress in their personal development and behaved outstandingly well. You have ensured that these areas of the school remain strong and continue to improve.

The lead inspector also recommended that teachers plan with greater precision what they want pupils to learn and that sixth formers are helped to make more-rapid progress by working with students of similar ability. Since the inspection, effective action has been taken to address both of these recommendations. It is evident that each pupil now has individual targets for each lesson and that teachers track progress against these targets carefully. In the sixth form, students are now taught in groups according to their needs and prior attainment. This has enabled the most able students to make particularly rapid progress in their learning.

Despite this success, you, your leadership team and your governing body are ambitious for further improvement. Since your appointment, you have identified a small number of key priorities for the school. These include taking a fresh approach to planning and developing a more varied, holistic and challenging curriculum. You have rightly identified the need to ensure that expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high. In addition, you have started to review assessment arrangements to help teachers identify more sharply what pupils know, understand and can do in order to inform their future planning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Safeguarding has a very high profile in the school and all staff display exceptionally high levels of care. They are devoted to their pupils and do all in their power to support pupils' well-being. Checks on the suitability of all those who work or volunteer in the school are carried out rigorously. Staff and governors have undertaken appropriate training in keeping pupils safe. Staff are alert for any signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. There are clear procedures in place for staff to share any concerns they may have about a pupil. You and your safeguarding team are tenacious in ensuring that vulnerable pupils and their families receive timely and effective support from outside agencies when required.

Pupils say that they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They know who to speak to if they are worried. You have put in place effective arrangements to ensure that students in the sixth form use the internet safely.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look in particular at the following aspects of the school's work:
 - the effectiveness of leadership arrangements
 - the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements
 - how well leaders have addressed the recommendations in the previous

inspection report

- how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs
 - the effectiveness of leaders' work to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils
 - how effectively governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities.
- Since your arrival, you have sensibly taken some time to take stock of the quality of education provided in the school. In addition, you have taken sensible advice from a headteacher who works in a similar context. Consequently, you have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your development plan identifies the right priorities. Subject leaders and those with responsibility for other areas of the school's work feel involved in improvement planning. They understand the important role you want them to play in developing the curriculum and improving assessment. Leaders willingly share their expertise more widely by leading a local initiative to support special educational needs coordinators in mainstream schools.
 - The curriculum is broad and balanced. In the early years, teaching is closely matched to children's needs. Expectations are high for all children. For example, the teacher's skilful use of language, gesture and resources enabled children who have autistic spectrum disorder to concentrate for a sustained period, and with visible enjoyment, on the story of 'The three little pigs'.
 - In the primary and secondary phases, leaders make sure that pupils have access to all of the subjects in the national curriculum at the appropriate level. For example, the teacher's creative use of household objects enabled a group of key stage 2 pupils who have complex needs to make exceptionally strong progress in their understanding of 'hard' and 'soft' sounds and textures. The school's own records and work seen in pupils' books show that all current pupils are making good progress towards meeting the targets set out in their education, health and care plans.
 - In the sixth form, an increasing proportion of students progress to the local college to pursue their chosen courses. Last year, all sixth-form students went on to an appropriate destination. This is because students follow a curriculum which is designed around their individual needs and so they make very strong progress.
 - There is a strong and highly effective focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the curriculum. Leaders are determined that pupils are able to play a full role in the life of the school and the wider community. For example, pupils engage in charity fundraising events, most recently for Syrian refugees. In addition, pupils relish putting on dramatic and musical performances that help build their confidence and which delight their parents. Pupils learn about topical issues, for example putting on an assembly for their peers about the Grenfell Tower fire.
 - You are not complacent about the curriculum. You recognise that expectations and levels of challenge are not yet consistently high for all pupils and that assessment does not always identify sharply enough what pupils know, understand and can do. Consequently, you are piloting in three classes an approach to the curriculum and assessment that supports pupils' academic,

cultural and personal development through rich and challenging experiences. The early signs are that pupils are responding well to this more holistic approach to teaching and learning.

- You and your leadership team are assiduous in identifying any barriers to learning and development that might prevent disadvantaged pupils from making the progress of which they are capable. You make effective use of additional funding to provide a range of interventions. Leaders monitor the impact of these interventions and change them if they are not working. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are making progress that is at least in line with that of their peers. Rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils are slightly higher than the average for the whole school.
- Governors are committed to the school. They have worked productively with the new headteacher to gain an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The experienced chair of the governing body provides wise and assured leadership of the governing body. Governors are diligent in ensuring that they have a good grasp of the areas of the school's work for which they have oversight. They visit the school regularly so that they can test out for themselves what they have been told and hold leaders to account for the impact of their actions. Governors are correct to identify the need to add success criteria and milestone targets to the new development plan so that they can measure the progress made.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers and other adults have high expectations so that all pupils are consistently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable
- the school's approach to assessment enables teachers to track pupils' progress against all aspects of the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and the acting assistant headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. Inspectors also held discussions with other leaders responsible for various aspects of the school's work. An inspector met with a group of pupils as well as with a small group of parents at the start of the day. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and with the governor who has oversight of safeguarding. The lead inspector also talked with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.

Inspectors observed learning in most classes, accompanied by members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan. The school's safeguarding arrangements were evaluated. Inspectors considered 46 responses to the staff survey and 14 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 free-text comments. Leaders converted Ofsted's pupil survey into a more accessible form for pupils with complex needs, which was then completed by 47 pupils.