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Mr David Deacon
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Deacon

Short inspection of Ashmount School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Janis Warren, 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 outstanding in March 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have strengthened leadership at all levels by sharing responsibility for school improvement with teachers and teaching assistants. Subject leaders are responsible for planning the curriculum in their own areas and reviewing the impact of what they do. Senior leaders support this work by providing them with regular opportunities to observe lessons, review pupils' progress and undertake further training.

Pupils are at the heart of what the school does every day. The school provides a welcoming, friendly and orderly learning environment. School staff treat visitors respectfully and efficiently. Pupils say how much they enjoy attending school. They feel safe and well supported by staff who give them regular feedback about their progress. This contributes to the very good behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the progress their children make and about how well your staff look after their children. The vast majority of parents are particularly positive about how well the school communicates with them and responds to their concerns.

You take very seriously the responsibility of the school to share its very good practice with other schools to help them become more successful. In addition, you provide training to leaders and teachers in your partner schools. However, the school's leaders are in no way complacent and continually seek to improve their

own practice and that of all of the school's staff.

You continually develop the curriculum to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing number of pupils on roll. You rightly prioritise improving pupils' communication skills. In addition, you provide sensory learning activities for pupils with complex learning and physical needs. However, teachers also work successfully to improve pupils' reading skills by teaching phonics, as well as approaches such as 'sensory phonics'. This helps pupils to develop their awareness of the letter sounds that make words.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked you to make sure that all staff have the confidence to make changes in lessons so that pupils keep learning. You now ensure that teaching assistants have regular training and preparation sessions in the mornings, before the start of lessons. They know each pupil's needs extremely well and the targets they are working towards. Every teaching assistant has a tracking sheet to record the progress each pupil is making during lessons. As a result, pupils make progress that is at least good from their starting points and achieve very well overall.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, staff and governors take safeguarding extremely seriously. They understand the complex needs and vulnerabilities of each pupil. Therefore, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and procedures for keeping pupils safe are robust, consistently applied and fit for purpose.

The school's safeguarding policy is comprehensive and up to date. The roles of staff responsible for safeguarding are clearly outlined. There is clear information about safeguarding, which is available for staff and parents. The school has strong links with the local authority, which provides regular updates on safeguarding which are circulated to staff.

All staff receive regular training in how to keep children safe. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding policies and procedures, which they follow stringently. In addition, senior leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment procedures.

Every pupil in the school knows who to go to if they have a worry or concern. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the school's curriculum. Pupils are encouraged and helped to solve problems and given the knowledge and skills to become more independent.

Many pupils in the school have medical conditions, some of which are very complex. Therefore, there are robust procedures in place for administering medication in school. For example, controlled medication is kept in a double-locked cupboard.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on what leaders are doing to improve attendance, how effectively leaders monitor and evaluate pupils' progress and how well the curriculum supports the learning needs of all pupils.
- Senior leaders have identified and are addressing the issue of attendance, which is currently below the national average. Staff do all they can to make sure that pupils attend school regularly. Support is in place for some pupils who, for medical reasons, cannot attend regularly. Leaders acknowledge the need to provide learning for pupils who are unable to attend school due to medical conditions and ill health.
- Teachers plan lessons that are well structured and pupils know what they are expected to achieve. Work is well matched to pupils' abilities, with an appropriate level of challenge for individual pupils so that they can extend their learning further. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants successfully engage pupils in learning.
- Teachers use a wide range of approaches to develop pupils' communication skills. Teaching assistants support this by modelling the language they want pupils to use. Some pupils use sign language, the Picture Exchange Communication System or other communication aids to help them to ask and answer questions.
- Robust systems are in place to track the progress pupils make and to set targets. Teachers set personal targets that link to the objectives in pupils' education, health and care plans. In addition, curriculum targets are closely measured using the school's assessment systems. Leaders and teachers regularly check the accuracy of their judgements about pupils' achievement by comparing their achievement with that of pupils in other similar, local special schools.
- Leaders and teachers have responded positively to the rapid rise in the number of pupils on roll since the last inspection. They have developed a curriculum which offers personalised learning activities for a wide range of needs and starting points. For instance, in some classes, pupils with similar abilities are grouped together for literacy and numeracy, so that they can learn at the same pace. Other pupils who have more complex needs work in the same class because they need more sensory or practical activities. School leaders and teachers think carefully about what is the best approach, so every pupil is able to make their best possible progress.
- Senior leaders have shared with subject leaders, teachers and governors much of the responsibility for improving the school. All contribute to the school's development planning and are held accountable for their actions in improving the school. However, sometimes targets are not sharp enough in identifying timescales and who is responsible for ensuring that actions are carried out.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's plans for improvement are sharper in identifying the timescales and who is responsible for ensuring that actions are effectively carried out.

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

Yours sincerely

Julian Scholefield
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher for the primary phase, the assistant headteacher for the secondary phase, school governors and a selection of school staff. We observed pupils on arrival, met some parents, visited most of the classes, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' current work. We considered the 30 responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding records and assessment information about pupils' progress. We studied the school improvement plan and self-evaluation summary. We also looked at information published on the school's website.