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Mrs Sarah Osborne
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Osborne

Short inspection of Oaklands School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018 with Karen Lewis, 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. We found all areas for improvement from the previous inspection had been met.

You, leaders and governors have successfully managed a number of significant changes since the last inspection. These have included your recent promotion to headteacher from deputy headteacher, the appointment of a new deputy headteacher and the changing profile of pupils. You identified the need to respond to the increase in the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders coming into the school. As a result of the training you provided, staff place more emphasis on communication and language, and have a greater understanding of how to meet the needs of the pupils with whom they work.

You and the leadership team have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Governors and leaders know the school well and have a robust plan in place to address the priorities you have already identified. You are developing work to distribute leadership more widely. This has helped staff to feel even more valued and have greater ownership of the school's work. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school and feel that they are well supported by school leaders.

The leadership team have developed effective systems to regularly check on the quality of teaching. This has ensured that any ineffective or poor teaching is dealt with through swift identification, support given and timely actions put in place. Leaders are, therefore,

driving up the quality of teaching and are determined to reach their ambition for the school to become a centre of excellence.

You provide a calm, orderly and purposeful learning environment. As a result, pupils behave well and show respect towards adults and one another. Pupils are also tolerant of, and keen to offer support to, each other. For example, when a pupil was finding it difficult to explain his thoughts about the school to an inspector, another pupil gently helped, using symbols to ensure correct meaning.

Parents and carers are generally very positive about the school and the difference it has made to their child's well-being and progress. Typical comments include: 'It is a brilliant school, my child has come on in leaps and bounds' and 'Oaklands is definitely one of the best specialist schools.' A few parents expressed the view that they would like more detail about their child's day to be written in the home-school book.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, training is up to date and records are detailed. Checks on the suitability of staff are appropriately rigorous. Staff are well briefed and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Staff are alert for any signs that a pupil may be at risk, and the school's records show staff are vigilant and report any concerns promptly. Records also show leaders are very thorough in their monitoring and follow up referrals they have made until they are confident appropriate steps have been taken. Leaders communicate well with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Leaders ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe through the curriculum activities teachers organise. This includes how to keep safe online and who to go to with a problem. Staff organise a wide range of outdoor activities for pupils, including within the forest area, and use these opportunities to teach pupils how to keep safe while they are having fun.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we explored agreed lines of enquiry. One focused on the quality of teaching, especially to support pupils' communication and interaction. We explored leaders' effectiveness in monitoring teaching and progress, the effectiveness of the governing body in challenging leaders and holding them to account, the effectiveness of the curriculum and safeguarding.
- We explored the steps leaders have taken to meet the needs of the changing pupil population. Approximately three-quarters of pupils in the school have autistic spectrum conditions or are diagnosed with autism, whereas previously the majority of pupils entered with moderate learning difficulties. Leaders have ensured that staff and governors have been given appropriate training and, therefore, have a greater understanding of the needs of their pupils. We observed staff and pupils making good use of signing, symbols and a variety of resources, including small whiteboards in lessons to communicate with each other.
- We found pupils make at least good progress from their starting points. Lessons are

purposeful and pupils respond well to the consistent routines. Pupils are happy at school and most behave well. Strong support is in place to safely manage any inappropriate behaviour and leaders have effectively developed a culture of positive reinforcement. As a result, most pupils try very hard with their work and individual activities. Staff, however, do not consistently provide challenge to their pupils, particularly the most able, and not all teachers systematically check pupils' work and understanding to make necessary adjustments for learning, as required by the school's assessment policy.

- Leaders track and monitor the school's assessment information effectively. They hold regular meetings with teachers to review the progress of each pupil. As a result, any pupil not making the progress expected is quickly identified and strategies to support are put in place. The case studies provided by teachers support this process well, enabling staff to consider all barriers to learning and, therefore, choose interventions carefully. Most parents who express a view feel they know how their child is progressing in school and feel involved in their child's learning.
- Teaching assistants support pupils' learning well by working within groups or with pupils on their own. Together with teachers, they encourage pupils to be as independent as possible and to make informed choices, albeit in a rather narrow range of contexts.
- Another line of enquiry was to see how well the curriculum meets the needs of the pupils. You and other leaders have effectively reviewed the curriculum and developed the two pathways to meet the needs of all pupils. You have developed outdoor learning and pupils enjoy the opportunities they are given to take part in activities both on and off the school site. They enjoy receiving visitors to the school, such as the drama group who worked with them on the day of the inspection. Pupils are supported well to move on to their next steps and succeed in modern British society. Therapists provide support to pupils with speech and language, drama and music. Pupils' work reflects the broad range of subjects covered across the curriculum.
- The governing body fulfils its statutory obligations. Governors are highly supportive of the school and share the ambitions of staff and leaders. They give their time freely and make sure they are up to date with training, for example in safeguarding. Since the last inspection, they have taken steps to gain first-hand knowledge about the school by coming in regularly to meet staff, to carry out learning walks and to take part in training. This has ensured that they are able to effectively challenge, as well as support, leaders. They have recently made important recruitment decisions in appointing you as the new headteacher and in the selection of the deputy headteacher. While they are clear about how leaders report to the governors, they are less sure how to check whether the information they are given is accurate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers make systematic checks on pupils' work, with appropriate adjustments to their activities in order to improve pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding
- teachers enable pupils to use the skills learned as independently as possible in a wide

range of contexts.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Morgan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspection team held a number of meetings with you and other leaders. The senior team accompanied inspectors on a series of short visits to lessons across all 12 classes. The inspection team held discussions with different staff about safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, the curriculum and measuring pupils' progress. Meetings were held with four governors, a group of staff and middle leaders. A discussion was also held with the school's raising achievement partner from the local authority. Inspectors also spoke with a group of pupils. Telephone calls were made to partners with whom you work closely, the primary school next door, the Ashfield Teaching School Alliance, a representative from the local authority, and the drama and speech and language therapists. We also spoke on the phone with a number of parents. The inspection team worked with senior leaders to scrutinise pupils' work and assessment information on pupils' progress. The inspectors looked at a range of school documentation, which included self-evaluation, the development plan, attendance data, records of pupils' progress and behaviour, pupils' case studies and evidence of records to keep pupils safe. The inspection took into consideration 41 responses to the staff survey. We considered 39 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 20 written contributions from parents, together with the school's own evaluation from the most recent parent survey.