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Ms Jackie Brathwaite  
Principal  
The Pioneer School  
Ghyllgrove  
Basildon  
Essex  
SS14 2LA

Dear Ms Brathwaite

### **Short inspection of The Pioneer School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2018 with Janet Tomkins, 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 June 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have ensured that the school has continued to evolve and improve since the last inspection in June 2014. You lead with great determination and are relentless in your drive to bring about improvements. You have built on the many strengths, as identified in the previous inspection report. You and your senior leadership team demonstrated to us that you know your school exceptionally well. Staff and pupils are proud to be part of The Pioneer School. Your school is a caring and nurturing place where pupils feel safe. You and your team have taken great care to ensure that the school is welcoming and that every pupil is valued.

It is clear that pupils are thrilled to come to school. From the moment they arrive, the excellent relationships between staff and pupils are evident. Pupils thrive on the school's unwaveringly caring and supportive atmosphere. A range of outstanding facilities, including the vibrant soft play area, imaginative sensory rooms and well-resourced music room, enhance the curriculum. The immersive room enables pupils to experience different situations, ranging from the local barber shop to the Amazon rainforest and under the sea. The interactive floor and walls provide the pupils with an experience they might never otherwise get.

Parents and carers are pleased to entrust you with the education of their children. The vast majority who articulated a view said that they would recommend the school to another parent. The home-school book is valued by parents. They use this to share their children's progress and new learning experiences at home. Parents' responses to a variety of surveys show how pleased they are with the school's work. One parent said, 'The staff are always willing to help in any way they can and know our children very well.'

The trustees have relevant and extensive experience, and they have used this when evaluating the impact of governance. The feedback on the school's effectiveness provided enables the school to further build an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for further development.

Strong governance supports the strategic direction of the school very efficiently. The chair of governors is passionate about the school achieving the very best for its pupils. Governors provide effective challenge and support for you and other leaders. They offer a wide range of skills and experiences. Governors are expanding the school's work to support pupils in local special schools. However, governors need to check assessment even more thoroughly. In order to do this, you agree that leaders need to refine the reporting of assessment information to ensure that this happens.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The senior leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You prioritise the importance of keeping all pupils safe. Procedures are exceptionally well tailored to pupils' needs.

Adults are highly aware that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they understand the signs that pupils may be at risk. They report and record concerns appropriately. You ensure that pupils are safe by undertaking detailed risk assessments, carefully considering the vulnerabilities of the pupils in your care.

Leaders have ensured that all members of the school community are listened to. The school council enables pupils to express anxieties and concerns that are then addressed carefully by staff. Pupils communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. Adults act as pupils' advocates, expertly obtaining their views.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, I explored how well post-16 students are prepared for leaving the school. This is because the section of the school's website that focuses on post-16 provision is still under reconstruction and I wanted to know more about this area. There is a strong emphasis on developing students' self-confidence, independence and resilience through an engaging curriculum. Students are encouraged to participate in mini-enterprise activities. All learners take part in an Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) independent living course that leads to accreditation. They are fully involved in

decision making about their next steps after leaving the school. The transition arrangements for post-19 are strong. As a result, students are fully prepared for the next stage in their development.

- We also examined the attendance rates of pupils at the school. This is because rates of attendance are often below the national average. It is clear that leaders do all they can to make sure that pupils attend regularly. Attendance is only low when the long-term medical absence of pupils is taken into consideration. A sensitive, personalised approach is taken with pupils who have missed school for a long period of time. Pupils want to come to school and enjoy the companionship of their peers. They do not take time off school without good cause. You recognise that to analyse and evaluate attendance further, there is a need to look more carefully at the attendance of groups of pupils.
- My final focus was on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You now ensure that target setting and planning focus on the next steps in pupils' learning. Working closely with staff, you use the objectives in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to carefully plan targets for their learning and personal development. You also make sure that all adults contribute as effectively as possible towards pupils achieving their learning targets. This is now a very strong aspect of your work. Teachers and learning support staff have exceptionally high expectations of pupils, and make excellent use of checks on pupils' progress to plan work. Pupils' progress over time is now impressive in many aspects of learning.
- The second area for improvement identified in the previous inspection related to leaders improving the link between self-evaluation and improvement planning. You were also asked to use the improvement plan to monitor effectively and evaluate rigorously how successfully any identified dips in learning were being tackled. You regularly evaluate school effectiveness and use the information gathered to inform detailed school improvement planning. Leaders are now meticulous at unravelling the reasons behind any dip in the performance of individuals and in making appropriate changes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further refine the reporting of assessment information so that it provides clearer and more useful information for governors
- there is an even sharper focus on the analysis of the attendance of groups of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we met with you, your senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the Academies Enterprise Trust. I spoke to you about your self-evaluation and the school development plan. We carried out a series of learning walks where we visited lessons with senior leaders. We spoke to pupils and observed them in class, during break and at lunchtime. We spoke to parents during the school day. My colleague also had telephone conversations with parents to ascertain their views of the school. I took account of 20 staff survey responses and 21 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 20 free-text responses. A range of documentation was scrutinised to find out about pupils' progress. We also reviewed procedures about attendance and keeping pupils safe.