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Mr Meic Griffiths
Headteacher
Waterside School
Robert Street
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Dear Mr Griffiths

Short inspection of Waterside School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Shaun Dodds, 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 October 2012.

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 available 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.

Your impressive and uncompromising leadership ensures that the whole school community shares your ambitious vision. Under your leadership, the school has made progress beyond your own and the local authority's expectations. This is because you demand the absolute best for pupils and their families. The school is not yet outstanding because all pupils do not yet make the best possible progress in reading and mathematics.

Since becoming headteacher of Waterside School, you have put in place a number of large-scale changes that are valued by current pupils, their families and staff. This includes improving site security to ensure that pupils are as safe as possible when at school. You have created a purposeful learning environment that is vibrant and welcoming for pupils and families. This has resulted in improved attendance and greater parental engagement.

Previous areas for development have been addressed effectively and strategically. Teachers' expectations have been raised significantly through work with local mainstream schools. You have sought good practice elsewhere and used this to

raise standards in your own school. You and your staff now share a firm commitment to raising attainment. Academic progress across the school is carefully and regularly tracked. As a result, leaders are able to accurately identify underachievement in a timely manner.

Governors and leaders have an in-depth and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Detailed plans are in place to further improve outcomes for your pupils, in both reading and challenging the most able. Your involvement of key staff in developing your school development plan has increased leadership capacity and progression opportunities across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff training is comprehensive and responds well to local risks and individual pupils' needs. Consequently, staff are skilled in keeping pupils safe, even when behaviour is challenging. The daily debrief meeting provides all staff with the opportunity to reflect on practice. It ensures that everyone is fully informed and prepared for the following day. Leaders proactively identify pupils at risk and target support accordingly, often avoiding problems even before they happen.

The pupils and their families that I spoke to reported that your school is a safe place to be, and that staff at your school genuinely care about everyone in the school community. This extends beyond the school building. One parent that I spoke to said that it was like 'always having someone behind you, helping you'. Another told me that, as soon as her son enters the building each day, she feels 'secure'.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the key lines of enquiry. This inspection focused on the effectiveness of leaders' actions to reduce absence. I also looked at how successful leaders have been in helping pupils to regulate their own behaviour. Lastly, I focused on ensuring that pupils are challenged to make the best possible progress.
- Opportunities to teach pupils to be tolerant and well-rounded individuals are built into the curriculum. Staff are encouraged to share how they contribute to their own communities to model good citizenship and respect for others. As a result, pupils have become more invested in the school community. Support and guidance from other professionals are effective and used wisely. Consequently, pupils with complex needs and mental-health difficulties are well supported to learn new strategies to cope with their emotions. The consistent positive behaviour management used throughout the school ensures that pupils are always clear about what is expected of them. The number of serious incidents has significantly reduced as a result of pupils learning to manage their own behaviour. Pupils develop the resilience to respond positively to negative influences outside of school. They speak confidently about how their behaviour

has improved over time, with one pupil reporting to me, 'Last year I didn't even think about anyone else's well-being, and now I care.' The headteacher's outreach service is recognised as providing good-quality support for behaviour and provides support for 59 other schools.

- The school's work with parents and carers has raised their expectations and has helped families to see the value of education. Because pupils enjoy coming to school, attendance has increased from less than 90% last year to 93% for the first part of this school year. One pupil told me: 'Last year my attendance was poor. This year I am actually here every day. That is because I have a goal. I like that my mood gets better at school.'
- When pupils arrive at the school, they make good progress from very low starting points. Comprehensive baseline information shapes the curriculum and support that individuals receive. Judgements are moderated both internally and externally to ensure that they are sound.
- You place a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' mental health, which has helped increase pupils' levels of engagement and resilience. Pupils are rightly proud of their achievements, especially in basic number skills, because they fully understand the purpose of their learning. Parents share this pride and one parent that I spoke to reported that this was not like other special schools where 'education is on the backburner'.
- Some pupils feel that there could be more challenge in lessons and, consequently, are not making the progress they could be in some areas. Leaders have identified a need to do further work to improve progress in reading and mathematics. The newly implemented reading programme does not as yet demonstrate sufficient progress in reading.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the newly introduced reading programme provides an effective system to develop reading across the school
- learning in mathematics is deepened to ensure that there is always suitable challenge for the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Francis McDonald-Gonzalez
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspection team held a number of meetings with you and other senior leaders. You accompanied the team inspector on a series of short visits to four lessons. The inspection team held discussions with different leaders about safeguarding, the curriculum, removing barriers to learning and measuring pupils' progress. Meetings were held with the chair of governors and three other governors, and a representative of the local authority. A meeting was also held with a group of five pupils. The inspection team worked with senior leaders to scrutinise pupils' work and assessment information on pupils' progress. The inspectors looked at a range of documentation. This included the improvement plan, attendance data, records of pupils' progress and behaviour and evidence of records to keep pupils safe. There were too few responses to Parent View, the pupil survey or the staff survey to generate a meaningful analysis.