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Mr Stephen Hoult-Allen
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Dear Mr Hoult-Allen

Short inspection of St Luke's School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018 with Mary Rayner, 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 February 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Leaders, governors and the local authority all acknowledge that there has been long-standing decline in standards at the school since the previous inspection. Governors, led steadfastly by the chair, highlighted concerns in 2016/17 and relentlessly pursued an improvement to the situation. They have worked with you, since your arrival in September 2017, to secure improvements in the provision.

In short, you have achieved a remarkable amount in the school in a relatively short period of time. You face all challenges with a quiet, calm yet passionate vision. This is underpinned by the view that St Luke's must improve provision for pupils in the community who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You refuse to resort to any 'quick fixes' or temporary measures. You have had to implement rapid changes to address urgent priorities. However, all changes are well thought out, are meaningful and are now being securely embedded. You are, therefore, bringing about sustainable improvements.

You have balanced the need for rapid change with a mindfulness about supporting pupils and staff through this transition. Consequently, staff support your leadership and pupils are happy and feel safe. Most pupils move confidently around the school, and welcome visitors enthusiastically, talking about their learning experiences with

pride. Most people are positive about the changes that you have brought. This includes pupils, parents, staff, governors and local authority representatives. You have been assisted very well by the acting head of school during this time, and the recently appointed head of school, who has been promoted from his middle leadership role. However, you all recognise that there is much work still yet to do to secure good standards in all areas of the provision.

Safeguarding is effective.

Upon your arrival, you and the local authority identified a number of concerns about the quality of the checks being made on staff. You have diligently addressed these issues, so that there are now thorough and relevant checks on all of the adults working with pupils in the school.

Staff are well trained and know the signs of concern to look for in pupils. They make appropriate referrals to safeguarding leaders when they are concerned. Leaders are tenacious in their work with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils get the right help when they need it.

Leaders understand the vital link between monitoring attendance and safeguarding pupils. Your new pastoral coordinator has quickly established systematic attendance checks on all pupils. This leader is also working well with families to help pupils attend school more regularly. Increasing whole-school attendance remains a focus in your school improvement plan.

Inspection findings

- Our first line of enquiry was to review how well you were establishing capacity in leadership and management at the school. This was because there has been some turbulence in staffing and leadership recently.
- First, you have addressed much of the serious financial deficit in the school's budget sensibly and effectively. You are also looking to resource essential improvements in the school's specialist provision through creative fundraising activities. You are bringing a more sustainable approach to the financing of school improvement.
- Governors continue to exhibit unwavering dedication to pupils at the school. They have supported you to establish an effective middle and senior leadership team. In order to overcome recruitment difficulties, you have talent spotted and 'grown your own' teachers and leaders through the school. You have also fully audited pupils' needs to identify where there are gaps in the school's provision. You have recruited specialists to ensure that these pupils' needs are fully met.
- In short, you have achieved a significant amount in a relatively short space of time. The staffing and financial situation in the school is improving rapidly. You have established strong leadership capacity. All leaders share your integrity and honesty about how to bring about genuine, rapid school improvement. Collectively, you are all starting to bring marked improvements to the school's provision.

- Another line of enquiry was to review the progress that pupils are making in academic and personal development. This is because published data does not give a full picture of the varied needs and starting points of pupils throughout the school, especially in their social, emotional and mental health development.
- You have worked with leaders to establish a well thought-out assessment system which gives you a thorough understanding of pupils' starting points, academically and socially. Staff training is helping adults to become confident in using this system with increasing accuracy. This is ensuring that you are better able to tailor specific support to pupils who need it.
- The assessment system is helping leaders to identify where you can better meet the needs, abilities, aspirations and interests of pupils, most notably some pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. You are starting to increase the accreditation, qualifications and breadth of curriculum available to these pupils.
- Staff are working well with pupils at the hospital school site, Forest House Education Centre, to re-engage them with learning. Pupils are positive about their experiences and the relationships that they build with staff here. You have identified that more work needs to occur, in liaison with your colleagues from the health provision, to increase the attendance of some of these pupils.
- You acknowledge that while teaching is improving, the learning needs of pupils are not yet being fully met across the curriculum. In particular, you have identified the need to enhance the qualifications, accreditation, work-related learning and life skills available to meet pupils' specific needs more precisely. Current pupils are not yet making consistently good social, emotional or academic progress.
- You have a clear long-term plan to address the poor physical state of some of the buildings and resources available to pupils. Historically, there has been significant investment in resources. These resources are not being used effectively and many are not appropriate to the needs of current pupils. You are seeking creative ways to fund more appropriate resources.
- You have made some very basic, yet important, improvements to the school day in order to better meet pupils' needs. For example, you have ensured that pupils receive appropriate help when they arrive on site each day. This is ensuring that pupils begin each day more positively. Equally, you have increased the amount of time that pupils are accessing meaningful learning opportunities each day.
- A small number of pupils and parents have understandably struggled with the pace of the changes that you have brought. You are working personally with parents and carers to ensure that you can find ways to best meet their children's needs.
- Staff practice in meeting some of the behavioural needs of pupils is improving. You are developing more specialists within the school who are accredited trainers in various techniques to support pupils. However, you acknowledge that leaders' analysis over time needs further sharpening so that leaders can know the difference they are making to pupils' behaviours.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- support adults to plan learning that ensures that pupils make good progress over time, especially pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder
- continue to evolve the curriculum so that pupils get broader access to accreditation, qualifications, life skills and work-related learning opportunities which are relevant to their needs, abilities and interests
- work with the local authority to continue to fund essential improvements in the specialist resources and school building
- sharpen the recording, monitoring and analysis of pupils' behaviour
- work with the local authority and clinical commissioning group (CCG) to further embed strategies to monitor and improve the attendance 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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we spoke with you, the acting head of school, the new permanent head of school, other leaders, and the school improvement adviser appointed by the local authority. I also met with members of the governing body. We visited a number of classes with you. We looked at pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire to report on. As a result, we spoke with a number of pupils throughout the day. We took account of 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, as well as 24 staff responses. We reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.