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Mrs Janet Spratt-Burch
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Spratt-Burch

Short inspection of Carlton Digby School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018 with Caroline Oliver, 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 and the leadership team have created an extremely caring and purposeful learning environment. Pupils are well known as individuals and the school takes great care to support their academic and personal development. All staff work together to provide the very best for every pupil. They give pupils every opportunity to achieve well. As a result, pupils are keen and confident learners who make good progress from their starting points.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of all you do. Pupils behave well and enjoy excellent relationships with adults. Adults consider pupils' needs carefully on an individual basis. Pupils have access to a well-resourced sensory room which enables them to experience calming influences if they become anxious. Pupils in the sixth form are given opportunities to undertake independent activities at breaktimes in a safe environment. This promotes their self-confidence well. For example, one pupil made tea and toast and then washed up independently, under the expert guidance of staff.

Senior leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. For example, leaders and governors have ensured that middle leaders are fully involved in improving the quality of teaching and learning. You have done this by providing middle leaders with appropriate training and support. You have also ensured that all staff have received training in providing pupils with clear guidance on their next steps. Scrutiny of pupils' books confirms that pupils receive meaningful and personalised feedback on a regular basis. Adults also provide pupils with accurate oral feedback on how well they are doing in their learning. For example, in one mathematics lesson pupils were learning to pay for items and receive the correct change. This was challenging for pupils. Staff provided precise guidance, as well as encouragement. As a result, pupils knew what they needed to do in order to move onto the next task.

Staff make good use of assessment information to help them set appropriately challenging targets for pupils. These are revisited at regular intervals and refined throughout the year. This sharp focus on pupils' progress and planning of appropriate learning experiences enable pupils to make good progress from their starting points, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils know their targets and they are proud of the work they do to meet them. They are also proud of their achievements. You have identified the improvements you will make to develop the school's assessment system further, including a greater focus on the personal and social aspects of pupils' development.

The quality of teaching at the school is good and is improving rapidly. Teachers say that they welcome opportunities to observe other colleagues in the school. This helps them to develop their own teaching through sharing best practice. You recognise that more opportunities for teachers to observe best practice within and beyond the school will be a factor in helping to improve teaching even more.

Parents appreciate the caring, inclusive and welcoming atmosphere that you create. They are delighted with the progress their children are making. Inspection evidence supports these positive views about the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders promote a strong safeguarding culture in the school. The roles and responsibilities of staff for safeguarding are clearly outlined in the school's policy and are on display in the school. Procedures for the recruitment of staff are secure. All the required checks on adults who work in the school have been completed. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date and staff are knowledgeable about the process of reporting a safeguarding concern. If a concern is raised, leaders take action promptly and a detailed log of events is kept, in line with the policy guidelines.

The transitions coordinator in the sixth form has developed positive relationships with pupils and families throughout the transition process. She provides ongoing support, linking well with colleges and external providers, to ensure that pupils and families receive the most appropriate support in their preparation for adulthood.

Pupils' attendance is tracked closely. The attendance of all pupils is above the national average for special schools.

Inspection findings

- Middle leaders now play a key role in improving the quality of teaching and learning at the school. They can articulate strengths and areas for improvement for their areas of responsibility. They undertake frequent monitoring of the quality of provision and consider pupils' outcomes by evaluating assessment information and scrutiny of pupils' workbooks. They provide clear feedback to staff on how to improve their practice.
- Leaders ensure that pupils receive effective feedback that has a positive impact on their learning. Teachers provide detailed feedback to pupils on how well they have done against their learning targets. Older pupils self-assess their work and are involved in considering what they need to do to improve it. Support staff are able to challenge pupils to do even better during lessons. Staff model learning well because they are enthusiastic about their own learning. This motivates pupils to focus on theirs.
- Leaders ensure that the tracking of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and girls, is helping to identify next learning steps and is responsible for pupils' good progress. Adults put in place personalised plans for pupils from their starting points. This is as a result of refining the assessment and tracking system to make it more accurate. Adults use information well to determine how staff are deployed to support the learning of pupils more effectively. Transition to key stage 5 and beyond has improved through a closer consideration of suitable pathways for pupils. Pupils' learning is personalised and is closely linked to their targets. Individual pupils' 'All about me' documents are used to good effect.
- Leaders have ensured that links between home and school are well established. Communication between home and school is effective in helping to ensure a continuity in learning. Adults are aware of their children's targets, with shorter-term actions and tasks being broken down into smaller achievable ones. This helps parents to support their children's learning at home.
- Leaders are promoting high aspirations for all learners. They ensure that there is contextualised learning for pupils; for example, by fundraising for the school disco. Staff use resources well to support pupils' learning. For example, in design technology pupils have access to a wide range of materials to help them to manufacture products.
- Governors are highly committed to ensuring that the school's provision meets pupils' learning and personal development needs. They have a crystal-clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that need further refinement. Governors undertake training so that they are well placed to challenge leaders constructively as well as provide support to help the school to improve.
- Leaders are relentless in checking on the views of pupils and taking these into account when making changes to the school day. For example, work experience is now firmly established and welcomed by pupils and staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems consider the personal and social aspects of children's development more closely
- teachers continue to benefit from sharing best practice within and beyond the school so that more teaching is outstanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Brooks
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the headteacher of the school, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the middle leaders and subject leaders for English, mathematics and science. We also held meetings with small groups of teachers and teaching assistants. We observed learning throughout the school with leaders. We reviewed pupils' work and communicated with pupils. We met with the chair, vice-chair and other members of the governing body. We listened to some pupils read and spoke with others. I checked records with your deputy headteacher and reviewed procedures about keeping children safe. We studied your school development plan and the school's self-evaluation. I considered the views of nine parents posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as the responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the responses to the pupils' survey and the 29 responses to the staff survey.