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Ms Joanne Hardwick
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hardwick

Short inspection of Samuel Pepys School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Caroline Parry, 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 October 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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a full section 5 inspection.

Your focused approach to making the school even better was evident from the outset of the inspection. Your resilience, commitment, astute leadership and strength of vision have ensured that the school has continued to build upon its many strengths. With the dedicated support of governors, you have overseen numerous changes since the last inspection. You have made sure that the issues for improvement identified at that time have received thorough attention, and you are continuing to refine the way pupils' progress is assessed. Your personal passion and drive for improvement have permeated the approach of your senior and middle leaders. The school is an outward-looking, reflective and innovative community. Since the previous inspection, the school's reputation has continued to grow and it is now oversubscribed. Your fellow headteachers and the local authority hold you in high regard.

Staff share a steadfast commitment to improving pupils' life chances and ensuring that they reach their potential, irrespective of their needs or starting points. Relationships between pupils and staff are exceptionally positive. This is a school where pupils succeed. Pupils say that they enjoy their time at Samuel Pepys School.

Parents are delighted with the school. They are especially pleased with the care and

support given by staff. Typical parental comments included: 'This is a fantastic school'; 'My child thrives'; 'Progress is phenomenal'; and, 'There is a fantastic atmosphere of inclusiveness.' Staff offer advice on the successful approaches that are used in school so that parents can use them at home.

Governors are extremely knowledgeable about the school's work. They have a wide range of skills that complement those of the school leadership team. They are rightly proud of the continual improvements made to the quality of teaching and to the standards achieved by pupils. They recognise the need to be fully involved with safeguarding and offer a wealth of experience in this area.

Safeguarding is effective.

The senior leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders, staff and governors regard pupils' safety as a high priority. You promote the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. All staff have a strong knowledge of their responsibilities towards keeping children safe. Leaders ensure that any concerns are followed up meticulously. Records are detailed and are of a high quality. The school's strong partnerships with external agencies help families to access any additional support needed. Risk assessments are personalised to pupils.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through a well-balanced curriculum which addresses personal safety and e-safety in different year groups. The school has a listening culture and offers very strong therapeutic support in a safe, caring environment through play therapy, person-centred art therapy and music therapy.

Staff, parents and pupils overwhelmingly agree that pupils are well cared for and safe. Governors keep a sharp eye on the school's safeguarding practice and have a comprehensive understanding of the latest statutory requirements.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I explored how effective your leadership is. This is because you had only been in post as a headteacher for 20 days prior to the last inspection. The impact of your inspirational leadership in empowering and supporting staff at all levels to develop their practice and achieve the highest standard possible is clear for all to see. Leaders are encouraged to undertake further professional qualifications. They have used their learning and research to enhance their understanding of pupils' needs. Challenging targets aligned to the school's priorities for improvement mean that staff fully understand their roles in securing the best possible outcomes for pupils. You ensure the effective deployment of teaching assistants and provide them with a wealth of learning opportunities. This has significantly improved the support provided for pupils. You have sharpened accountability at all levels. You have established a culture of high aspirations where all those spoken to are keen to play their part in your improvement plans.
- Improving literacy is a high priority for leaders at the school. There are regular opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure. Pupils use phonics skills to read

texts that are well matched to their abilities. They spoke to inspectors with pride about their school literacy lounge. This provides a warm, welcoming environment for pupils to read books, newspapers and magazines, and to 'lose' themselves in stories, encouraging a lifelong love of books. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are developed successfully across a range of subjects by applying them to real-life situations. For example, in an enterprise lesson, pupils were seen to develop their mathematical understanding by weighing out ingredients and calculating the cost of food. They further developed their literacy skills by writing in detail about the products they created.

- Transition arrangements are comprehensive and thorough. They are personalised to the needs of the families, and done with great care and sensitivity. The early years team places a high emphasis on the relationships between the school and families. Parents say they value the home visits. The transition book provides a clear line of communication between home and school. You encourage parents to attend 'parents as partners' learning activities, to observe their children and to join in with activities. This is why parents believe 'transition is great'. One parent described the school as providing a 'big hug' for her child, as the school made its pupils feel safe, secure and confident. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education. They value the opportunity to complete work experience which builds their self-esteem, self-confidence and skills for living. The strong working relationships you have with those working in local colleges enable students to make a much easier transition from the school. All of the students who left last year secured a place at college or a community interest company, which develops employability skills, with the objective of being 'work ready'.
- We agreed to look at the attendance rates of the school. This was to see if pupils are attending school as often as they can. School records show that absenteeism is due to medical conditions. The school works extremely closely with families to help support them. Leaders ensure that any pupils who are absent are given the support and time they need to catch up, through bespoke programmes of learning. These support pupils return to the school successfully. Very few pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are persistently absent from school. Fixed-term exclusions are extremely rare. There have been no permanent exclusions.
- My final focus was on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You now ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve their learning in lessons. Staff share targets with pupils using a variety of approaches, such as using photographs, symbols and clear, accessible language. They also talk about 'learning' rather than 'doing', as appropriate to the needs of individual pupils. Personalised learning is at the heart of the school's approach to the curriculum. Staff know their pupils exceptionally well and this means that they are given the right amount of help to make strong progress, and to understand what they need to do further in order to improve.
- The second area for improvement identified in the previous inspection related to teachers with leadership responsibilities working closely with senior leaders to develop the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. There has been a strong, sustained drive to improve the quality of the curriculum. You have reallocated the curriculum leadership roles and responsibilities to ensure that you

make best use of teachers' skills and interests. You regularly liaise with other special schools within and beyond Cambridgeshire to develop good practice. Staff make the most of professional learning opportunities and attend national conferences to ensure they have the most up-to-date curriculum and assessment information. Senior leaders work closely with staff to ensure that both areas are constantly adapted to meet the individual needs of the pupils.

- Leaders are not complacent about the quality of education the school provides. For example, you rightly acknowledge that you need to focus on further refining the school assessment systems. This is to ensure that the recording of pupils' personal outcomes and academic outcomes takes account of the smallest steps achieved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further refine the assessment process in order to capture pupils' learning and progress in further detail.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you and your senior leaders, two representatives from the governing body and a group of pupils. We spoke with parents. We visited lessons with senior leaders, looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning.

We considered the results from the Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 32 free-text responses submitted by parents online during the inspection. We also considered 40 responses to the online staff survey and nine responses to the online pupil survey.

We examined a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about safeguarding, child protection procedures and pupils' progress. We observed behaviour at breaktime and spent time in the hall at lunchtime.