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Mrs Dawn Wigley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wigley

Short inspection of Ash Lea School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018 with Jason Brooks, 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.

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.**

The school community has experienced a number of significant changes and challenges over the last three years. These issues are now resolved. You are now in a position to ensure that identified school improvement priorities are addressed quickly.

Until recently, the school's curriculum has not fully met pupils' needs. The staff, supported by national curriculum specialists, have designed and implemented the Ash Lea curriculum to suit the very specific needs of the pupils. The changes have now been fully implemented and are proving to be effective. This more effective curriculum, coupled with the improved accommodation, is leading to improved rates of progress for almost all pupils and to a significant reduction in challenging behaviour incidents.

The relationships between staff and pupils are good. Pupils say that they like the new school and are able to talk to staff. One pupil told the inspector that she 'enjoyed school and liked gardening'. The staff know pupils very well and promote their positive self-esteem and total communication, including sign language and the use of picture symbols. This ensures that all pupils are able to communicate and to make choices. All are supported to develop their skills for life.

Pupils cooperate well with each other and are polite and helpful to visitors. Parents and carers who contacted the inspectors are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. A representative comment was: 'This is a wonderful school where every child is nurtured and cherished.'

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to work in partnership with the local authority, to improve the accommodation so that it meets the wide-ranging needs of pupils. Leaders were also asked to ensure that tasks fully match pupils' abilities. You and the governing body have addressed the issue of accommodation and have made progress in ensuring that tasks match pupils' abilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective, leaders have ensured that pupils feel and are kept safe. Procedures and systems are in place to ensure that pupils and their families get the support that they need. Staff and governors receive training and are alert to the potential risks to pupils. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, specifically relating to the safe administration and storage of medication. Leaders have ensured that the required statutory checks take place and are recorded. Pupils trust the adults in the school. Leaders have taken effective action to reduce the episodes of challenging behaviour. When incidents do happen, they are dealt with quickly, sensitively and efficiently by all. Inspectors observed behaviour to be good around the school. Pupils' attendance is monitored and reviewed by leaders and there are effective systems in place to check on the well-being of any pupil who is absent. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed.

Inspection findings

- Inspectors reviewed whether leaders had addressed the areas for improvement identified from the last inspection. Inspectors looked at whether leaders have maintained a good standard of education since the last inspection. We reviewed how leaders evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school, why the information required for parents was out of date on the school website and how the school uses its policies and systems as a school-improvement tool. Inspectors also investigated whether behaviour was safe in the school and analysed attendance patterns across the school.
- You and the governing body have ensured that the new school accommodation and budgetary issues have been addressed. You have also introduced a comprehensive new curriculum across the school. These three high-priority initiatives have been approached with diligence, professionalism and tenacity. As a school, you have succeeded in ensuring that the new building is fit for purpose, that the budget is now showing a small surplus and that you have a new detailed curriculum that much better meets pupils' needs.
- Since the previous inspection, the systems to check on school's effectiveness have become disorganised and lack some rigour. For example, a significant

number of statutory policies have not been updated and/or scrutinised by the governing body for the last two years. Despite undertaking a detailed review of governance, governors have been slow in putting the appropriate recommendations into action. Not all governors fully understand their roles, and some have focused too narrowly on operational matters. There is now evidence of a wider focus within governance.

- Some statutory policies are out of date and are not reflective of the positive work that is taking place in the school, nor are they representative of the positive teaching and learning experiences observed by inspectors.
- The current evaluation of the school's strengths and weakness is over-generous. For example, governors have not had the time to be thorough when checking the school's performance. Governors are committed to the changes needed and are holding leaders to account more thoroughly than has been the case in the past.
- You and the assistant headteachers are committed to making a positive difference to pupils, their families and staff. Middle leaders are not fully effective because they have not had as much impact on school improvement as they might.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is a strength. Pupils are taught to respect each other and the new school buildings, and they are polite and well mannered. They respond well to receiving positive praise. Almost all pupils attend well. Those who have medical conditions, including emotional and anxiety-based problems, are well supported by individual school staff. However, this aspect of the school's work lacks a strategic oversight. In spite of this, behaviour across the school is calm and purposeful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors quickly develop a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities in order to hold the school leadership team to account more effectively.
- leaders swiftly set out their plans to improve the quality of the school's self-evaluation and analysis so that progress can be precisely measured, monitored and reported
- they develop the role of middle leaders to add capacity to improve the effectiveness of subject implementation
- the school's website has all the required specified information for parents and is up to date and that all statutory policies are updated and approved.

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

Gary Nixon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the two assistant headteachers, two members of the governing body, including the chair, a representative of the local authority and members of teaching and non-teaching staff. There were joint visits to classrooms and a visit to the after-school clubs. We observed pupils arriving at school in the morning, spoke and signed with pupils and looked at pupils' work. We studied in detail the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation, notes of visits from peer review and education advisers, records about behaviour, safeguarding and attendance. We considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire, the 17 responses to the Ofsted free-text service for parents and the 21 responses detailed in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.