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Mrs Zoe Evans
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Evans

Short inspection of Rosewood Free School

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 2018 with Chris Hummerstone, 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 your school was judged to be outstanding in July 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Key to this accomplishment is your unrelenting drive for continual and sustained improvement. Consequently, the school has grown in stature and, as a result of your terrific leadership, now wields significant influence in championing principled and high-quality education for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Since the last inspection, leaders have increased the reach and impact of the school's exemplary practice by establishing a multi-academy trust (MAT). Initially, this MAT, which began in September 2017, includes one other special school, Great Oaks School. Furthermore, you also work with a number of special schools across the country, holding even greater sway in the latest research as you are determined to secure the best possible provision for pupils, evaluated against the highest standards.

Pupils benefit from your commitment to ensuring that the school is of the highest calibre and meets their needs well. You and other leaders are at your very best when challenged and stretched by others, such as when participating in thought-provoking educational discussion. Consequently, you actively seek external views, determined to learn from a rigorous assessment of your own and your staff's work. You appreciate debate and deliberation with external advisers and are highly committed to the school's ongoing development, displaying an openness to learning from others. The school improvement plan reflects this ethos and includes a clear, stepped approach to improvement across the year, engaging all stakeholders. The targets set are aspirational and reflect leaders' extraordinary level of ambition for the pupils in their care.

You, other senior leaders and staff are truly dedicated to the families who attend this school. You are clear that education, when at its very best, encompasses the whole family. As a result, you believe wholeheartedly that your core purpose is to provide an 'education for all'. The whole team, including trustees, governors, leaders, staff and parents and carers, exemplifies the school's ethos. All share the same passion for achieving a rich, education that embraces the whole child. One parent encapsulated the views of others, stating: 'The school is amazing. You get a real sense of family within the school and it is very apparent that the staff love the children and their jobs. They encourage and empower the children to reach their full potential while providing a high standard of support and teaching.'

Staff are highly expert in meeting the care and educational needs of each pupil exceptionally well. They are dedicated to their roles, working tirelessly to ensure that pupils receive the highest quality of education. All said that they enjoy working at the school. Staff recognise the benefit that their expertise and complete dedication brings. One member of the team commented: 'Workload is high. The very detailed nature of our assessments, the complexities of our learners' needs and our thorough approach to safeguarding necessitate this, but very little of our workload is not directly of benefit to the children or the families we support.' As a result, pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. However, this year, disadvantaged pupils are not progressing as rapidly as their peers. Although individual plans for pupils are well considered, your plans to diminish the difference are underdeveloped at a whole-school level.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to strengthen the records of governing body meetings so that they reflect the level of debate, rigour and challenge that takes place. You and your governors have received additional support from Hampshire's Governor Services. The quality of meetings' records is now detailed and minutes capture the level of discussion well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is excellent and extends far beyond the school's gates. Staff expertise has strengthened since the previous inspection, due to the depth of knowledge and understanding of the school's designated officer, who is also the deputy headteacher. On taking up the role, the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) established a clear benchmark, noting the competence of staff in their application of statutory guidance. Nevertheless, the expertise of staff has strengthened further as the DSL has developed their understanding of the extensive and particular needs of PMLD pupils and their families. Induction procedures for new staff are thorough and the DSL ensures that all staff are well versed in the school's safeguarding procedures. Staff fully consider the well-being of the whole family when instigating appropriate, additional support, making good use of the thorough training they receive from the DSL. One parent noted: 'All the staff from top to bottom are excellent and very compassionate. They all take good care of my children as well as the well-being of me, as a mother.'

The school's safeguarding policy is comprehensive and meets requirements. It is

kept under regular review. Nevertheless, you and I agreed that guidance for staff on what to do if they suspect a concern about female genital mutilation is less well defined in the school's policy, and this should be strengthened. All the required pre-appointment checks on staff are conducted and recorded on the school's electronic system. However, record keeping, such as the methodical filing of new employees' references, is not as systematic as it should be.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the effectiveness of teaching and the contribution of the school's curriculum in promoting high achievement, including for disadvantaged pupils; pupils' attendance and the school's work with parents; and the effectiveness of leaders and governors in driving improvement, particularly as the school embraces a new multi-academy trust arrangement.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans due to profound and multiple learning difficulties and some also have multi-sensory impairments and physical disabilities. Teachers set high expectations that are rooted in a deep knowledge and understanding of every pupil's individual requirements. Staff are able to capture and respond to the most subtle of signals from pupils. Pupils use these to express their preference, for example. Staff respond appropriately because pupils' communication strategies are so well understood and interpreted. Parents praised the quality of teaching, with one commenting: 'They encourage and empower the children to reach their full potential while providing a high standard of support and teaching.'
- A fundamental foundation of the school's successful curriculum is teachers' well-planned and thoughtful approach to developing pupils' acquisition of communication skills and developing incrementally their cognitive development. Teachers are quick to modify or adapt their approach in order to motivate pupils and secure concentration. Teachers and support staff sustain high levels of engagement with pupils and this enables pupils to achieve well. The majority of pupils make excellent progress from their starting points.
- The vast majority of pupils have complex medical needs. This means that prolonged hospital stays and hospice visits that facilitate respite care are commonplace. Leaders ensure that obstacles to pupils' continuity in schooling are generally overcome. Staff regularly travel off site to provide educational opportunities to pupils who are in receipt of medical treatment. This means that when pupils return to school, learning continues uninterrupted and builds well on pupils' next steps.
- First-class relationships with parents assist greatly and enable the school to get the most out of pupils' potential to secure good attendance. The school has established a beneficial online system called 'share at Rosewood' that puts appropriate emphasis on improving attendance by encouraging families' direct involvement and providing additional help. One parent praised the school's approach, saying, 'There is an excellent support network to ensure that my

child's educational and health needs are met.'

- In recent times, and following the formation of the MAT, new and well-considered governance structures have been agreed which include a key role for the local governing body. Although some governors are new to role, including the chair of the governing body, there is a high level of commitment to playing their part in supporting school leaders well. This includes a whole range of monitoring activities planned into this year's improvement plan. Governors are securing a firm foothold, establishing an emerging and well-respected presence. Governors are aware that they now need to become even more alert to some key aspects of their strategic responsibilities, including the impact that additional funding has on accelerating pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they make appropriate checks in order to satisfy themselves that record keeping, particularly that relating to the appointment of staff, is well organised, systematic and meets their expectations.
- they retain a more strategic overview about how the school uses additional funding in order to diminish the difference between disadvantaged pupils and others.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you and two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and also a trustee. We observed learning across all age ranges from the early years through to post-16, with you and the deputy headteacher. We took account of six responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including five free-text comments and one email from a parent who is also a governor. We also took account of the views of 26 members of the school's team who responded to the online survey for staff and seven responses to the pupils' survey (submitted by parents on behalf of their children). We analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.