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Mr Daniel Lewis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lewis

Short inspection of St Nicholas' School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2018 with Mark Dale-Emberton, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and other leaders provide pupils with a calm, friendly and supportive environment in which to learn. Pupils are happy and well behaved, and enjoy school, with one stating, 'School is perfect.' Pupils are engaged in lessons and proud of their work.

You and other leaders are passionate about striving to improve the outcomes and life chances for all pupils. Along with senior leaders, you ensure that all pupils continue to make good progress. Your staff have strong knowledge of the individual needs of pupils, and are committed to promoting their well-being and independence skills.

You are reflective and have an accurate view of the effectiveness of your school. You have successfully introduced new strategies which have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection. You have identified aspects of the school's provision that could be better and, along with other leaders, have plans in place to develop these swiftly. You recognise that the request from some parents for improved communication between school and home is a priority for you and other leaders.

Governors are insightful and well informed, and know the school very well. They visit regularly and have high expectations for all pupils. The monitoring of safeguarding practice forms an important part of governors' visits. Parents and carers are largely

very positive about the school, with one parent stating: 'The individuality of each pupil is acknowledged and very complex needs met in a kind and respectful manner.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements in the school are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and thorough and you and your team all have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures.

You have effective communication systems within school, including between the different sites, and with outside agencies. These systems, along with the in-depth knowledge your staff have of pupils, ensure that any concerns are noticed and acted upon as soon as possible so that pupils remain safe.

This is a caring school. Trusting, understanding relationships between staff and pupils result in pupils feeling safe and secure. They are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make very good progress during their time at the school. You encourage and support pupils to aim high. As a result, in addition to academic progress, pupils make very good progress with their behaviour, independence and physical development. You make sure that lessons are motivating and designed to meet the individual needs of pupils, and that routines and expectations of pupils are clear. This enables them to understand their work, enjoy their learning and find the curriculum fun and engaging. Satellite provision in local schools provides pupils with invaluable social inclusion opportunities which allow them to thrive.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to practise and develop their functional literacy and numeracy skills throughout the day. For example, pupils in a cookery lesson had used their numeracy skills to work out the cost of the dish they were making. Students in a sixth-form enterprise lesson were learning to use money in a variety of appropriate ways. Phonics teaching is engaging and at an appropriate level for each pupil, helping all to make good progress with their reading and writing.
- You, along with other leaders and governors, regularly review all aspects of the school's provision. The safety and welfare of pupils are your first priority. You have put in place effective new strategies and procedures to ensure that each pupil is secure and safe in school.
- Leaders are highly skilled and knowledgeable, and continually look for ways to further improve the school. You have listened to the views of parents and recognise that communication between school and pupils' families could be better. Your family support team has already had a positive impact but you understand that there is still work to do in this area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- communication between the school and parents is further improved.

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

Yours sincerely

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I met with you and other leaders. We visited lessons on three different sites with you and the deputy headteacher. We spoke to some pupils in class and looked through their work. We held meetings with key staff about the progress of pupils and safeguarding. We also met with a group of pupils and, separately, with a group of staff to hear their views about the school. We met with governors, spoke with the lead for education and safeguarding in Kent, and spoke with a representative from the local authority. We considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey. We considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, Parent View, spoke to a number of parents at the end of the school day and telephoned parents to hear their views. We took into account a letter given to us. We scrutinised a range of the school's documentation and a selection of pupils' work.