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Mr Jonathan Howells
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Dear Mr Howells

Short inspection of The Cedar School

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 2018 with Andrew Penman, 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 Cedar 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.

You lead the school with clear determination and a passion to see pupils engage in learning and make good progress from their starting points. You are supported ably by your deputy headteacher and wider leadership team, who share your vision and care for the pupils at the school. Teachers and support staff follow your expectation that each pupil should be included in every aspect of school life. All staff who responded to the staff survey said that they are proud to work at the school and enjoy their work. As a result of your firm commitment, pupils are supported well and thrive at The Cedar School.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. They say that staff support them well by understanding their individual needs. One pupil remarked, 'We love school but not just for the lessons. It is more than that.' The culture of togetherness and shared values that you have established is respected by all, and results in exemplary behaviour throughout the school. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school. They feel that staff go to great lengths to meet the needs of their children. One parent commented: 'The whole school seems to be on the same page; that is, they [staff] all go the extra mile.' Parents consider the school to be well led. Communication between school and parents is effective, although conversations regarding attendance are not prioritised.

Leaders and governors have addressed the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection successfully. All teachers now use the school's system for planning and tracking. Leaders and staff use this system effectively, helping them to have a much better understanding of the progress of current pupils. Staff are beginning to share best practice regularly. In addition, a highly developed focus on individual pupils' needs within the curriculum allows all to access a wide range of learning experiences, including several outdoor practical activities. Teaching is typically effective. However, occasionally it is not consistently strong across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The single central record details accurately the robust employment and background checks that leaders carry out on staff and other adults in the school. Adults are trained appropriately in all areas of child protection and know what actions to take to keep pupils safe from harm.

The school works effectively with other agencies to make sure that pupils are safe. Staff maintain useful relationships with a range of other professionals to support highly vulnerable pupils.

You and your staff show an extremely strong commitment to pupils' well-being. Pupils say that they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They know who to speak to if they are worried.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we considered leaders' actions to improve attendance. We also focused on how effectively leaders monitor and evaluate teaching and learning to ensure that all groups of pupils make strong progress, given their specific needs. In addition, we considered how well the governing body holds leaders to account for the current and future success of the school.
- Leaders do not prioritise attendance as it is broadly average when compared to other similar schools in the local area. Key staff are in place to challenge absence and there are effective monitoring routines in place, although these are not always rigorous in nature. When pupils do not attend school, staff work hard to find out why and to establish where they are. However, you acknowledge that there is more work to be done so that attendance improves.
- An effective system for monitoring pupils' progress is now in place. This is apparent in all lessons, with most staff using it comfortably. The unique curriculum offers staff the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of pupils' needs. There is a powerful focus within the curriculum on building pupils' confidence and self-esteem. However, there are still areas where teachers' assessments need to be more accurate to maximise the progress for all pupils.
- Social times, such as breaktimes and lunchtimes, are well managed, safe and engaging. Pupils enjoy interacting with each other positively and making choices

about what they would like to do. Staff ensure that inclusion for every member of the school's community is paramount. For example, physical activity is promoted for all. Where disabilities may be a barrier to participation, staff use innovative methods to ensure that all pupils have a purposeful involvement. Pupils show tolerance and acceptance of each other's needs and enjoy celebrating each other's successes. Relationships are incredibly strong, allowing an atmosphere of trust to flourish. From this position, pupils actively engage in learning and welcome help to improve.

- You have a passionate and committed governing body that brings a range of skills from outside of education to the strategic leadership of the school. This wider knowledge and expertise has enabled you to begin to further develop accountability at all levels, resulting in standards being driven upwards.
- Members of the governing body are rigorous in their pursuit of high standards, challenging leaders during scheduled meetings and visiting regularly to check the validity of leaders' reports. Like senior leaders, governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They appreciate the work of staff and are keen to support you with the school's next steps.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance is prioritised and improves
- teaching, learning and assessment further improve to match the very strong provision for pupils' personal development and welfare.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Tostevin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We observed teaching and learning and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in all areas of school. Most observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. We held meetings with you, senior leaders, teachers and support staff, as well as with the chair of the governing body and two governors. A telephone call was held with a representative of the local authority. We scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluations of the school's performance, minutes of the governing body's meetings, policies, safeguarding records, records of pupils' attendance and

behaviour, and information about pupils' progress. We also scrutinised the school's website. We spoke to pupils during the day. We also considered 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff, and eight responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including two free-text comments.