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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Debbie Foolkes
Interim headteacher
Lady Zia Wernher School
Ashcroft Road
Stopsley
Luton
Bedfordshire
LU2 9AY

Dear Mrs Foolkes

Short inspection of Lady Zia Wernher School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 2018 with Paul Copping, 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 outstanding in October 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. With the support of staff, you have created an excellent learning environment in which pupils thrive and make strong progress from their varied starting points.

The senior leadership team, under your expert guidance, is extremely well organised. Together, you are ensuring seamless transition to new headship in September 2018. You have sustained a culture of high aspirations and set the tone for the continuing improvement of the school.

Parents are very pleased with the school. They praise the dedication of staff. Your own recent school survey, completed by many parents, and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive. One parent commented on how her child 'makes outstanding progress, owing to the high-quality teaching and caring attitude of all staff involved'. Another parent wrote: 'This school is an excellent school with very kind and supportive staff, very well organised, and I feel that my son is in very safe hands.' The evidence from this inspection confirms these positive views.

Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is excellent. Staff expertly break down barriers to learning. They look beyond pupils' complex needs and provide many exciting opportunities for pupils to discover the world around them. Children are encouraged from an early age to develop their independence and never give up when faced with challenges. Staff make a real positive difference to

the lives of pupils and their families. The very large majority of staff who responded to the survey, which was conducted as part of this inspection, said that morale is high and that they are proud to work at the school.

You acted positively on the recommendation of the previous inspection to improve outcomes for the most able pupils. You have developed more demanding learning pathways to accelerate their progress. Flexible groupings and bespoke learning programmes ensure that all pupils, regardless of their difficulties or background, can succeed and shine.

The new chair of the governing body has a clear overview of the school's effectiveness. He is ambitious and determined to ensure that the school sustains its high quality of education. However, many recent changes in the membership of the governing body have reduced its capacity to hold leaders to account. Meetings conducted during this inspection confirmed that the school and the local authority are actively seeking to improve the expertise and composition of the governing body so that it reflects more closely the multicultural make-up of the school community.

You are rightly proud of your outreach work and close partnership with other special and mainstream schools in Luton and further afield. The local authority is confident in leaders' ability to maintain the high standard of education that the school provides.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are diligently using a new and more efficient recording system. Incidents, such as unexplained absence from school, are logged promptly with clear actions taken to support families. The school's record of the required checks on members of staff complies with requirements. The member of staff in charge is thorough and acted on the minor recommendations of a comprehensive local authority audit. The management of transport at the beginning and end of the day is well orchestrated and secure.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is very strong. Staff are highly vigilant and have an excellent understanding of pupils' specific needs. Staff are well trained in understanding pupils' vulnerabilities, particularly the high levels of medical needs. A member of staff said that she was extremely aware of her responsibility for the pupil she was looking after. She was observed as she confidently and sensitively applied the good training that she had received. This excellent practice was consistently seen across the school.

With the support of the deputy safeguarding leads, you ensure that concerns about pupils' welfare and well-being are pursued vigorously. Referrals to relevant agencies are timely. The partnership work with the many agencies and services that help families to keep children safe and healthy is very strong. The work of the two highly dedicated senior family workers is exemplary. Their in-depth knowledge of the needs, language and culture of the families that they support is second to none. Their well-targeted involvement through smart early help assessments and action plans means that families are quickly signposted to relevant services. In many cases, their help is preventing the need for the intervention of children's social care services.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed some key lines of enquiry. We looked at the quality of leadership and governance because a new headteacher is joining the school in September 2018 and the composition of the governing body is changing. I have already reported above on these two areas. Leadership is very strong and governance, although supportive, requires some consolidation to make it highly effective.
- Another key line of enquiry focused on pupils' rates of progress, across all groups and in the early years foundation stage. This included a check of the school's assessment process. Inspection evidence shows that children make a very good start in the early years. Progress in understanding the daily routines is quick. Children were observed responding to their names at morning registration with staff skilfully using pictures and sounds to capture their attention. Music therapy is highly effective. Adults use a range of mechanisms to assess children's progress and share these with parents. Assessment in the early years was moderated by the local authority this year and judged to be thorough and accurate.
- The 'going-on-holiday' theme, as part of the well-planned creative week, provided first-hand evidence of very strong progress in developing pupils' physical skills and independence. The large pool is much appreciated and is used safely. Staff employ a wide range of communication strategies and tools, such as Makaton and multi-sensory theatrical techniques, to stimulate responses from pupils. The hall, transformed into a huge beach, was buzzing with excitement. The highly-positive behaviour of pupils, guided sensitively and firmly by staff, led to excellent outcomes. Older pupils responded very well to staff's cheeky challenges, such as in the rainforest, using water guns to splash staff in a friendly battle.
- Although there was some delay in acting on the recommendation of the previous inspection concerning the progress of the most able pupils, current pupils are making rapid progress, including pupils who are disadvantaged and also the most able. The school's more-able-most-able (MAMA) group was observed making rapid progress in understanding weight, numbers, colours and texture thanks to the excellent range of resources and the highly effective support of all adults. Staff take part in moderation exercises with other schools to check the quality of their assessment across key stages 1 and 2. However, the school's new assessment processes require some development to make assessment more effective.
- The next line of enquiry was about attendance. The most recent performance information indicated that the rates of absence and persistent absence were considerably above the national averages. Current data shows that poor attendance is mostly due to pupils' severe medical needs. The senior family workers liaise effectively with the local authority attendance officer and conduct home visits, some unannounced, when concerns are identified. However, the overall attendance figures are not brought together and analysed well enough. As a result, governors have an insufficiently strategic overview of attendance patterns over time.
- We also looked at the impact and quality of the school's outreach service and the training of staff. There is a strong learning culture in the school. This extends to ensuring that parents and carers learn alongside the school. The links with the adult

learning services in Luton are used to good effect for this purpose. You are carefully analysing and reviewing whether staff training is of the highest quality. Staff are keen to develop their skills in using modern technology to maximise pupils' access to the curriculum. Staff's expertise is shared widely, such as through the special schools assessment and moderation group (SSMAG). This is highly beneficial to your own staff and staff working in other schools, including mainstream schools. Your senior leaders' and your own dedication to the quality of education of pupils with special educational needs, beyond Lady Zia Wernher School and your own outstanding school, Woodlands, are laudable.

- Finally, I checked other aspects of leadership. We went through the school's website and identified where improvement could be made. The deputy headteacher and I looked at the outdoor learning environment. We agreed that some outdoor spaces should be refurbished. These areas for development are already identified on the school's development plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the expertise of the governing body is consolidated so that performance information, such as data on attendance, is evaluated and used to hold leaders more closely to account
- the school's new assessment process is embedded to sustain pupils' rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the Ofsted inspector and I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. We met the chair of the governing body and the local authority school improvement adviser. I also met two senior family workers and a member of the office staff. Senior leaders joined our visits to classrooms, where we observed pupils working and playing. We spoke to staff throughout the day. We observed pupils in lessons, before school and at breaktimes. I spoke to staff in charge of transport. I considered 10 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, and took account of the school's own most recent parental survey. In addition, I received six text messages from parents. The Ofsted's staff questionnaire

was completed by 53 staff. I read school documentation, including the school development plan, your own review of the school's effectiveness, minutes of governing body meetings and information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.