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Mrs Susan Howe
Headteacher
Chessbrook Education Support Centre
Tolpits Lane
Watford
Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Howe

Short inspection of Chessbrook Education Support Centre

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018 with Ofsted inspector Sharon Wilson, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together you have strived to achieve excellence in every aspect of your work.

Pupils feel safe, secure and supported. They told us that they feel that the teachers listen to them, like them and treat them with respect, which they reciprocate. Responses from the school's own parent survey and from the parents we spoke with could not be more complimentary about the way you and your staff team go over and above what one would expect to ensure that children are given every opportunity to succeed. The moment a young person is referred to the school, you make your expectations of parental involvement very clear. The ongoing support from personalised learning mentors and the very positive relationships they are able to form with the pupils and their families are instrumental in the progress pupils make.

All staff feel equally supported. They appreciate the investment you make in their professional development and the opportunities they are given to 'have a voice', knowing that you value their opinions.

You, along with your leadership team, have created a culture where staff and pupils expect to be challenged to do their best. Your relentless reinforcement of 'never turning a blind eye' has resulted in a provision that is built on mutual trust and respect and that enables everyone to succeed.

Your goal is to ensure that as many pupils as possible are supported in their mainstream schools to ensure that they do not actually need to attend Chessbrook. The Extended Roll Service is very highly regarded by primary and secondary schools, and the support they give is helping you to achieve this goal. Highly effective relationships with mainstream schools and the structures that together you have put in place help pupils to remain in their mainstream setting or to reintegrate as soon as they are ready. However, despite the success of this work, support for pupils identified at being at risk of exclusion in their move from primary to secondary school requires a greater emphasis within the school settings.

Since the previous inspection, the school has been designated as a teaching school. This has enabled you to share the excellent practice that exists at Chessbrook through your delivery of courses to mainstream colleagues that focus on effective strategies for curriculum and behaviour support.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to sustain outstanding teaching and achievement by ensuring that all leaders maintain a sharp focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time. Robust monitoring by the senior leadership team and middle leaders ensures that teaching is highly effective and that pupils achieve exceptionally well. This is borne out by the impressive range of both academic and vocational qualifications they attain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding the pupils is the number one priority of all of the staff. The pupils attending the centre are vulnerable and the school does everything it can to ensure that they are safe. The daily 'circle time' activities and personal, social, health and emotional (PSHE) curriculum are forums for discussion and debate with the pupils. They raise awareness of the risks that pupils may encounter in the local community such as knife crime, drugs, peer-to-peer abuse and internet safety. They provide them with strategies to use should they feel threatened in any way. The school also works closely with the police and other agencies who visit and contribute to these sessions. The work of the personalised learning mentor is also instrumental in supporting parents when they think their child may be experiencing problems.

Alternative provision staff receive safeguarding training from school staff and follow the same policies and procedures. A member of the Chessbrook staff has responsibility for monitoring the work of these providers and ensures that the pupils attend daily. The use of the pupil progress tracker by all providers at every session ensures that the progress made by pupils while at the alternative provision is also closely monitored.

The relentless drive, commitment and vigilance of the leadership team, together with all of the staff, result in safeguarding practices and procedures that are robust and effective. Rigorous and ongoing training equips staff with the knowledge and expertise to identify concerns in a timely manner and to respond to need.

The management committee rigorously monitors safeguarding policies and

procedures and ensures that all statutory requirements are met. It checks that comprehensive records are kept relating to any concerns and that appropriate action is taken to address these.

Inspection findings

- You and your leadership team clearly know your school very well and are always striving to see where you can improve practice. Your management team is suitably supportive, while providing effective challenge through the work of its committees and its involvement with the school. This, combined with external monitoring by the school improvement partner and local authority services, contribute to your accurate understanding of the work of the school.
- Every moment a pupil spends in the school is seen as a learning opportunity. The curriculum is truly personalised for each pupil so that you are able to build on their academic strengths and vocational interests, which helps to successfully motivate and engage them in their learning.
- As part of the rigorous induction programme, all pupils undergo baseline assessments that ensure that their curriculum plans reflect their needs. The pupil progress tracker is used in every lesson both at the school and at the alternative provision. Pupils therefore know what progress they are making and what their next steps should be, both academically and socially. Pupil progress meetings are held termly with parents and carers, pupils and personalised learning mentors. This has a positive impact on how teachers monitor progress and how information is shared with each pupil and parent.
- The very rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning means that all pupils benefit from highly effective teaching that enables them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of curriculum activities. Literacy and numeracy are given the highest priority across all subject areas, and this enables pupils to succeed where previously they had encountered difficulties.
- The courses and opportunities delivered by the alternative providers are of the highest quality and help to develop the self-confidence and self-esteem of pupils attending through the awards they are able to achieve in a range of activities.
- The consistent implementation of the behaviour policy ensures that pupils are very clear about what is and is not acceptable and they respond very well to the school's merit system. The regular tracking of pupils' social and emotional well-being is very effective in measuring the impact of the interventions that have been put in place. 'Chill and Chat' sessions and 'Stop and Think' programme sessions with personalised learning mentors have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the outcomes for each pupil.
- The attendance monitoring systems are extremely rigorous and effective. Every absence is followed up and as the pupils are also registered at their mainstream school, information is passed on to these weekly. Many pupils are able to access the virtual learning environment online and this is also very carefully monitored. There have been no permanent exclusions, and following any incidents of inappropriate behaviour, a 'repair and rebuild' form is completed by the pupil, and interviews are then held between the pupil and teacher so that the next day

is a fresh start. Building resilience, both for staff and pupils, is given very high priority and this has resulted in improved attendance figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- consolidate the partnership work with primary schools so that the excellent practice that exists in Chessbrook can be shared more widely.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Walker
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, senior and middle leaders, and teaching and support staff. We spoke to the chair of your management committee and the chair of your resources committee. We also spoke with your local authority school improvement partner. We considered the responses from your school's parent survey and had telephone conversations with parents and several local headteachers. We met formally with a group of staff and considered the 35 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff. We met formally with a group of pupils. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and to talk to pupils and the staff who work with them. We also observed pupils during brunchtime. We looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. We conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping. We also visited Building Zone 1 and The Prince's Trust alternative providers.