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Mrs Jane Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Short inspection of Dorin Park School & Specialist SEN College

Following my visit to the school on 25 September 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Mark Burgess, 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 July 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 have led a team of forward-thinking senior leaders to establish an open culture within the school. Staff feel valued because of the time that senior leaders invest in their development. They appreciate the freedom to try new approaches to cater for pupils' diverse and often complex needs. Staff feel proud to be part of the school. The relationships they have with pupils are excellent. Pupils who are new to the school settle in well because staff understand each pupil's needs. Parents and carers are positive about the way in which staff work with their children. Pupils enjoy their work and make good progress in their learning.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed effectively. You have ensured that there has been comprehensive training for staff on how to communicate effectively with pupils. Pupils follow instructions and respond well to questions because they understand what is expected of their learning. One notable example of this development is the consistent way in which staff use sign language. You have also revised systems for setting individual targets for pupils. This has been successful in helping some pupils to achieve GCSEs at the end of key stage 4. However, this has been less successful in challenging some of the younger pupils within the primary age range to make even greater strides in their learning. Governors provide knowledgeable support and challenge for leaders. However,

governors do not fully hold leaders to account for the progress of some of the most able pupils in the primary age range.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have created a distinctive character within the school by securing an exceptional commitment from staff to the needs of pupils and their families. As such, there is a strong, vigilant culture within the school. Staff routinely report the slightest concerns so that leaders are able to analyse and address any emerging trends in pupils' behaviour. Staff receive effective safeguarding training to keep them up to date with the most recent statutory guidance.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, there were a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at how well children in the early years progress. Children make good progress to meet their targets, which is evidenced well in their records of learning. Those who need more time to consolidate their skills have opportunities to stay in the early years for a longer period. This enables children to develop basic skills so that they form sound foundations for their future learning. Staff quickly establish strong relationships with children so that the children feel safe and secure. Children smile. They are attentive and interested learners because staff engage them well in their learning. However, the targets set for some of the most able children do not provide opportunities to achieve even higher standards.
- We looked at how effectively governors hold leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes. Governance is a strength of the school. Governors have clear strategies through which they challenge leaders. They have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of teaching and learning. At meetings, they ask pertinent questions to champion the needs of pupils. They have a good understanding of the range of special educational needs and/or disabilities that pupils have. However, the information that leaders share with governors does not report on achievements that exceed the targets set for pupils' learning. Consequently, governors are unsure about the proportion of pupils that make better-than-expected progress. This is particularly true for pupils in the primary age range.
- We also looked at how effectively careers education enables students to move on to positive destinations when they leave the 16 to 19 provision. Students receive individualised advice that focuses on their aspirations, as well as their interests. They spend a day each week at college and learn skills for independent living. For example, they write letters of application and think carefully about the questions that they might be asked at interview. Students feel confident when applying for a place at the local college and many go on to study there. They also have opportunities to experience working in different settings, including a cafe and a falconry centre. These experiences are effective in ensuring that students are positive about the future and are keen to experience the wider world.

- Finally, we considered how well assessment information is used to inform pupils' next steps in learning. You have developed and refined 'learning pathways' for pupils that are based on regular and accurate assessments of pupils' skills. This has ensured that pupils at the end of key stage 4 have been successful at GCSE level for the first time in the school's history. However, although you are setting high expectations for pupils' achievement, the work in the books and the learning records show that some of the most able pupils are not provided with the work that would enable them to achieve even higher standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in the primary age range are provided with work that challenges them to achieve even higher standards
- governors hold leaders to account for the achievements of the most able pupils in the primary age range to set even higher expectations for pupils' learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you, leaders and governors to discuss safeguarding and aspects of the school's leadership and management. We visited classes with you and senior leaders. We reviewed documentation about safeguarding, including the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff. We reviewed behaviour logs and spoke with students about safety at the school. We conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work from the early years, key stage 1 and the sixth form in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. We reviewed documentation which included: pupils' individual plans and targets; governors' minutes; the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses; and the school development plan. We spoke to parents and took into account 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 51 responses to the staff survey.