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Mrs Alison Rooney
Headteacher
Furze Down School
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Dear Mrs Rooney

Short inspection of Furze Down School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Hilary Goddard, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since taking up your role in 2015, you have continued to drive forward excellence throughout the school.

You and your staff care passionately about ensuring that pupils feel valued. Your team helps pupils to flourish. Thanks to the expertise of teachers and therapeutic staff, pupils make excellent progress in both their academic and personal development.

Your school has built excellent links with a range of universities. This has enabled you to take part in the latest research. Your work with University College London, for instance, has given staff a greater understanding of developing pupils' communication skills.

Parents and carers are delighted with the school. A typical comment was:

'What the school has done is beyond anything I could hope for. She is always happy and staff support her tirelessly. I have seen such improvements in her emotional well-being, as well as her attainment. I honestly could not ask for more.'

Almost every parent who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View,

would recommend the school to others.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was situated in an old building that was not fit for purpose. Your move in 2014 to a new building has enabled you to provide many more facilities. For example, those who are interested in film studies make good use of the well-equipped studio to create movies.

The local authority has justifiable confidence in the school's leadership. It is developing an outreach service at your school so that others in the locality can benefit from your expertise.

As you are aware, at the previous inspection you were asked to increase the range of communication and interaction resources. This has been achieved successfully. Your school is always moving forward. You have identified that the next step is to ensure that most-able pupils always make the strongest progress. With typical thoroughness, you are developing links with academic institutions to research how this can be done most effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority in the school. Parents say that the safety and well-being of their children are central to the school's ethos. Staff are alert to any change in pupils' behaviour. They know exactly what to do if they have a concern, and act quickly to ensure that pupils are well protected.

There are excellent relationships between staff and pupils. Staff help to reduce pupils' anxieties through effective de-escalation strategies. Pupils say that they feel safe. Parents and staff expressed very few concerns about bullying. Their views are supported by the very low number of incidents that are recorded.

Staff safeguarding training is thorough. It is focused on the risks that are most relevant to the pupils. Pupils say that staff help them to be aware of potential dangers. Pupils know that they need to be alert to the possible risks from strangers. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe when online. Many post-16 students know how to stay safe when travelling on their own.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. For example, thorough checks are made before staff start working at the school.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to check the impact of leadership on improving the school since the previous inspection. We found that leadership at all levels is exceptional. You have guided the school through a large expansion programme, while maintaining an outstanding quality of education. Your dynamic leadership has challenged all staff to drive further improvements.
- During our visit, we examined the impact that the pupil premium funding has had

on the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. We found that disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress in their English, mathematical and communication skills. In the past, you recognised that social, emotional and mental health needs were not met so well. Funding was therefore used to provide a clinical nurse specialist. This support has had a significant impact. As a result, disadvantaged pupils attend well and make excellent progress.

- We considered the impact of the curriculum on pupils' academic and personal development. You have worked hard to develop a curriculum that best fits pupils' needs. Staff ensure that all pupils develop an effective system of communication. This means that, from an early age, all pupils can contribute their ideas and express their views. Self-confidence is well developed. For example, pupils recently acted in a production of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' at a local theatre. Staff help pupils to come forward with their ideas. Recently, for instance, the school council contributed their views on equipment for the playground. Pupils are proud that they are helping to make the school 'an even better place'. The curriculum prepares pupils well for their future lives. It helps pupils to learn about the value of money. Some pupils set up mini-enterprise projects. For example, they sell wooden home accessories they have made at a local market.
- Post-16 provision is equally impressive. It provides students with excellent opportunities to prepare for their next stage of education or training. Students benefit from highly effective teaching. They can study a large range of subjects, and complete a range of accreditations and level 1 qualifications. There is a strong focus on helping students to become independent. For example, students make good use of the food technology rooms. Students enjoy using the small flat to practise their daily living skills. You go to great lengths to ensure that work experience matches students' interests.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of therapeutic support. In many cases, there is a multidisciplinary team supporting each pupil. Working alongside teachers in class, therapists develop pupils' skills and help them overcome difficulties. Therapists know the curriculum well. They tailor their support so that it links in with what is being studied. For example, speech and language therapists reinforce the language and vocabulary of specific topics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they develop links with research institutions to investigate how to further improve the progress of most-able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Bowes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, members of your senior leadership team and governors, including the chair of governors. There was a telephone conversation with your independent adviser. Discussions were held with pupils. We also spoke to a few parents at the start of the school day and took into consideration the 44 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. Together, we visited classes and looked at pupils' books. Views expressed by 62 staff who had responded to the staff survey were also considered. A range of school documentation was checked, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance; plans for improvement; records of assessment and behaviour; the single central record of pre-employment checks; policies and procedures; and minutes of governors' meetings.