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Mr Stewart Harris
Executive Headteacher
Phoenix School
49 Bow Road
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Dear Mr Harris

Short inspection of Phoenix School

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 2018 with Joy Barter, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Since the last inspection, leaders have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school. You expect every pupil to make strong progress from their starting points and to be well prepared for a fulfilling adult life. Leaders and staff have risen to your challenge. They share your ambition and determination for pupils to succeed. Your school's popularity is very much due to the quality of education provided.

You and your leaders regularly check the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You are clear about the strategies that enable pupils to make strong progress. You ensure that the small steps of learning are tracked and that they inform planning. You have recently analysed the data for attendance. This analysis gave you the information you needed to develop your work with parents and carers whose children were not attending regularly. Now, far fewer pupils are regularly absent from school.

Leaders support teachers to provide an education tailored to meet the individual needs of every pupil. You place a strong emphasis on pupils' social and emotional development. This helps to build their confidence and self-esteem so that they make progress academically, and leads to higher achievement.

Dynamic and collaborative teamwork is a highly effective feature of your school. Teachers, support staff and therapists work well together. They plan memorable aesthetic, creative and tactile activities. These activities assist recall and reinforce new learning. Enrichment activities, such as yoga and swimming, further enhance

the curriculum. High-quality education helps pupils improve in all aspects of their learning. They improve their communication skills because communication is central to every lesson and activity. They learn how to manage their behaviour because of the emphasis placed on consistent and calm behaviour management. They make strong academic progress from their starting points.

Leaders value working with parents as important partners in children's education. You work closely with parents, providing training, advice and support. Parents appreciate the lengths that staff go to in order to support them to help their children's learning and development. They value the help that they are given to support behaviour and learning at home. The impact of your work with parents has been recognised through a national award scheme.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective across all sites. Leaders make sure that staff and governors are well trained. Training is of a high quality, and is regular and current. One member of staff told me, in a comment typical of many, that recent training was the best safeguarding training they had ever had. It covers statutory guidance and local challenges and risks. Staff understand the signs of neglect or abuse. They know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil.

Leaders meet weekly to review safeguarding issues. They involve other staff and partners as appropriate. There is strong awareness of vulnerable pupils and families. Records of concerns are meticulously maintained. Parents are happy with the school and are confident that their children are safe.

Governors diligently fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. Regular reports from leaders keep them informed of priorities and issues. Relevant checks on staff, governors and other adults are comprehensive and well maintained. Leaders ensure that procedures for site security and safety are effectively managed across all sites. Risk assessments for visits and enrichment experiences are comprehensive and thorough.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on three areas to demonstrate the school's strengths.
- We first considered how leaders prepare young people for the next stage in their learning. We chose this aspect because of the value that leaders place on effective transition between one phase of education and the next.
- Arrangements for supporting pupils as they move into a new class or a different year group are a real strength. Leaders and teachers make sure that pupils' progress does not reduce because of changes in staff, the curriculum or the environment.
- Leaders ensure that handover arrangements are thorough and that record-keeping is meticulous. Pupils are well prepared to move to their new classes. They visit classes and meet new staff. They join in activities in new surroundings.

These experiences help pupils to become accustomed to, and to accept, change. Teachers keep detailed records of pupils' learning, communication and behavioural needs. These enable receiving teachers to build on pupils' prior learning and help pupils to settle.

- Purposeful work-related activities prepare pupils well for adulthood. Pupils enjoy their work in the café and at the coffee cart. They are proud of their achievements. They help prepare food and drink, and they take orders and look after the equipment. They told inspectors which jobs they liked the most and why.
- Leaders and teachers build strong partnerships with local employers, schools and projects. Through these, pupils access wider opportunities for work-related learning. For some pupils, their preparation for adulthood is further strengthened with accredited awards where this is appropriate. You organise a formal graduation ceremony to celebrate pupils' successes when they leave the school.
- Our second area of focus was how leaders ensure that pupils develop communication skills to enable them to access the curriculum and make progress in their learning.
- Inspectors observed a broad range of communication strategies. These included picture exchange, visual timetables and electronic communication aids. Leaders and staff make exceptionally effective use of these.
- Leaders and teachers are highly successful in developing pupils' communication skills. This includes pupils who are not yet communicating verbally.
- Specialist staff with expertise in speech and language support colleagues extremely well. Staff appreciate and learn from high-quality professional development that leaders provide, as well as from informal advice and support. This builds confidence and competence among staff and further supports pupils' progress.
- Teachers are well organised, calm and determined in their approach to lessons. They enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and to regularly practise their communication skills.
- Well-organised snack times provide pupils with opportunities to practise communicating their choices of snack. Pupils enjoy this part of the day. They take their turn patiently and they confidently express their preference for fruit, toast or crackers.
- Our third focus was the impact of strategies to help pupils manage their behaviour and access their learning.
- Teachers' management of pupils' behaviour is a strength. Staff appreciate the training and support that you provide. This helps them to confidently create a positive and caring classroom community.
- Leaders and staff manage behaviour in a calm and assertive way. They work effectively as a team to support pupils well and prevent situations from escalating. They ensure that action to support pupils' behaviour is tailored to the needs of each child. Staff appreciate the training and advice that you provide as it supports them in creating an atmosphere in class that is positive and calm.

- The familiar routines of the school day also support behaviour very well. Pupils know what to expect when they arrive on the bus, when they go into assembly and when they have their lunch. Activities such as those included in 'Friday Fun' help pupils to manage their behaviour in new and unfamiliar settings.
- Leaders' analysis of behaviour incidents means that they know not only which pupils are involved, but also the time of day and specific locations when and where issues typically may arise. Leaders use this information to manage the risks in these areas and times. This focused work has led to a rapid reduction in the number of incidents. It has contributed overall to the calm and orderly atmosphere in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- continue to evaluate thoroughly the quality of the school's work and provide educational provision of outstanding quality in the context of increasing demand and complexity of need.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Moon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the start of the inspection, we agreed three lines of enquiry. Inspectors held meetings with members of staff, senior school leaders, the chair of governors and the designated safeguarding lead. I met with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed learning in all year groups and at different sites. Inspectors spoke to pupils and observed them in their lessons and around the school. We spoke to students on work-related learning. Inspectors met with parents and considered the 22 responses to Parent View and the free-text service for parents. Inspectors also reviewed the 105 responses to the staff survey. We reviewed a range of documents, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation and policies and procedures for safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, communication and destinations.