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Mrs Suzanne Thrower
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thrower

Short inspection of Knightsfield School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 2018 with Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop HMI, 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 November 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 you started in January 2017, you have worked hard to ensure that pupils come to a school where they can flourish. You are an effective headteacher who has quickly gained the confidence and support of staff. As a result, all staff who responded to the online survey agreed that the school is well led and that they are proud to work there.

Parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive about how hard you and your staff work to ensure that pupils are given every opportunity to succeed. Parents express appreciation for how well you support their child's needs so that they develop confidence in themselves, both as learners and as people. One parent spoke for many in saying, 'Knightsfield School has fundamentally improved our lives as a family because the staff believe in my daughter and push her to achieve her best.'

Together with your new leadership team, you have established a culture of mutual trust and respect where pupils are challenged to do their very best. Strong, positive teacher-student relationships ensure that classrooms are calm, purposeful environments. Staff work with patience and persistence to ensure that pupils enjoy their learning. The behaviour of the pupils seen at breaktime and lunchtime was exemplary and no examples of poor behaviour were seen throughout the inspection. If incidents of poor behaviour occur at school, they are recorded, and the information is used to inform future planning for the pupil.

You and your team have worked hard to address the area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Teachers now reinforce and extend pupils' communication and language skills in lessons to accelerate their achievement. The impact of your actions is evident in the high numbers of pupils exceeding expectations at GCSE in subjects such as English, maths, religious studies and art.

Governance is a strength and trustees know the school well. They provide the school with excellent support and challenge in equal measure. This is because trustees robustly monitor the school using a range of evidence, including both internal and external reports. As a result, trustees are clear about the school's achievements as well as its priorities for the future. Trustees told inspectors that to continue to improve school leaders need to further sharpen key documentation such as the school's self-evaluation and school development plans. This is so that these documents better reflect the strong practice in the school and allow trustees to continue to hold the school firmly to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that procedures are robust and that the school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Child protection records contain a clear chronology including any actions undertaken by the school to keep students safe. There is strong evidence of multi-agency work with appropriate referrals made to children's services. Changes have been made to the school site as well as to procedures at the start and end of the school day in order to ensure that pupils are always kept safe. Leaders understand the particular vulnerabilities of their pupils and make sure that staff are well trained to spot any signs that they might not be safe.

Trustees' oversight of safeguarding is excellent. They are able to appropriately challenge leaders because they have developed suitable safeguarding expertise themselves. All necessary checks are undertaken in a timely fashion to ensure that trustees and adults employed at the school are suitable to work with children and young people. Records are detailed and logged appropriately on the school's single central record, which meets all statutory requirements. Trustees use a range of evidence to monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding, including commissioning audits by the local authority.

The curriculum supports pupils to remain safe as they become more independent. For example, pupils have ample opportunities to consider topics such as consent, sex and relationships and how to stay safe online. Leaders ensure that pupils are safe when taking part in off-site activities, such as attending the local college or taking part in lessons at the mainstream setting which shares the school site.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum effectively meets the needs of pupils. Staff assess pupils on entry to gain a detailed understanding of their abilities and needs. This information is used by leaders to support pupils and ensure that they make as much progress as possible.

- The curriculum is exceptionally well constructed. It is appropriate for the pupils at the school, some of whom also have additional needs, and extends their communication and language skills in lessons. The curriculum is designed to encourage personalised learning pathways to meet the needs and aspirations of each individual. Examples of these pathways range from bricklaying and plastering courses at college, to A-level courses at the co-located mainstream secondary school. The curriculum inspires pupils to learn and underpins the impressive progress that they make.
- Learning in lessons is highly personalised to meet the needs of individuals. For example, in one Year 11 mathematics class some pupils were studying GCSE mathematics whereas others were working on either functional skills mathematics or entry level mathematics. In this lesson pupils were highly engaged in their learning and keen to achieve. They could explain clearly to inspectors what they were doing as well as why.
- Teachers have high expectations of what can be achieved in lessons and there is the correct amount of challenge to hold pupils' interest. Pupils told inspectors that they feel that work is set at the correct level for them but is also challenging. They are confident that they can achieve well in lessons and are not afraid of getting things wrong. They take pride in their work.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their life. There are regular careers days such as a recent visit to Ryanair. There are whole-school careers days to support pupils' aspirations as well as developing the skills required for their next steps. In Year 11 there is a week-long work experience placement that is bespoke to individual needs and aspirations.
- In the sixth form, students have the opportunity to follow a wide range of courses at the co-located mainstream school and at a local further education provider. Individuals are supported by staff going with them to these courses and acting as notetakers so that the students do not miss any aspect of the learning due to their hearing impairment.
- Sixth-form work experience is linked to the course being followed, such as a work placement in key stage 3 physical education lessons at the co-located mainstream school for a student studying level 2 sports science. The school carries out all the health and safety assessments so that students can also undertake private work placements. Even so, you acknowledge that the careers information could be further developed by linking it more specifically to subject areas. This would support students' decisions when choosing subjects to study in key stages 4 and 5.
- Preparation for adulthood is enhanced with a seamless programme of integration with the co-located mainstream school. Pupils join their peers for mainstream lessons in physical education, art and drama in key stage 3 as well as some courses in key stage 4 and 5. At lunchtime pupils are happy to go to the mainstream school for meals and interact freely with their peers from that setting.
- When pupils are absent, effective monitoring procedures ensure that they return to school as quickly as possible. The school works very closely with families to increase attendance and has strong relationships with parents, who know that the school has the best interests of their child at heart.

- The procedure for pupils absent from school is clear. The school works hard to ensure that pupils' education does not fall behind if they are absent. Regular home visits by school staff including the headteacher help pupils to return to school smoothly after extended absences.
- Leaders ensure that the well-being needs of their pupils are met. They are well supervised at the beginning and end of the school day as well as at lunchtime and breaktime. For example, staff run regular 'pop-up' sessions to ensure that pupils have purposeful activities for these unstructured times. The sessions held on the day of the inspection included football, hula-hooping, juggling and singing as a member of staff played the saxophone.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the school. They say that bullying is extremely rare but that there are some 'squabbles' between peers that are quickly resolved by staff. Pupils have every confidence that the school would deal with any incident of bullying swiftly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop further the school's careers information by linking it more specifically to subject areas to support pupils' option decisions.

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

Yours sincerely

James Adkins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your school business manager. I also met with the chair of the trustees and two other trustees as well as a representative from Herts for Learning, the school's local authority. Senior leaders and inspectors visited key stages 2, 3, 4 and 5 to jointly observe teaching and learning. Inspectors spoke to pupils during their lessons and met with a group of them in the afternoon. We reviewed pupils' work in lessons. You presented information including attendance information, performance data, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's development plan. Safeguarding records were scrutinised and discussed with you a wide range of matters related to safeguarding, including vetting procedures. I reviewed the information and policies on the school's website. I considered the 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.