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Mr Richard Triggs
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Dear Mr Triggs

Short inspection of North Cornwall Alternative Provision Academy

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019 with Her Majesty's Inspector Jen Southall, 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

The move to a new site in refurbished premises in September 2017 allowed the school the opportunity to expand and introduce a primary unit for pupils aged five to 11. Consequently, the number of pupils at the school has almost doubled since the inspection in April 2015.

You have developed the facilities to incorporate specialist teaching spaces which are well equipped. The science laboratory has all the facilities necessary to be able to teach to GCSE level. This – in part – addresses one of the areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection. You have also created bespoke multisensory rooms to accommodate pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

With the increase in pupil numbers, so the number of staff has increased. Directors of the multi-academy trust have appointed well-qualified staff to complement the existing workforce. You have adapted the curriculum to make best use of your colleagues' skills, for example through developing the on-site outdoor environment as a teaching resource and embracing learning outside the classroom, including in an area of local woodland owned by the trust. In response to the previous inspection, you have appointed a family support worker and retain the services of mentors and counsellors. As a result of this support, pupils are better able to manage their anxieties and, consequently, exclusions have fallen dramatically.

The school is providing a much-needed educational resource in north Cornwall. Leaders of local schools talk positively about the school's work, which often results in pupils returning to mainstream schools. The school has a good track record of older pupils gaining qualifications that prepare them well for their next steps. One parent commented, 'My son has been able to grow and will leave the school ready and equipped to deal with adult life.' This inspection confirms the school's effectiveness.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and pupils are clear about their responsibilities with respect to safeguarding. Pupils know who to speak to when they feel they may be at risk of harm. Staff members are vigilant to any indicators of harm. They are swift to share any concerns with leaders who have specific responsibility for safeguarding, who act quickly to protect pupils.

The school's family support manager – supported by a family support worker – provides advice and guidance to pupils and their families. They also liaise with specialist agencies and hold them to account when they are not meeting pupils' needs.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have overhauled the curriculum since the previous inspection to better help pupils. This ensures that pupils can return to mainstream schools successfully as they do not fall behind. Staff – often supported by the trust's subject specialists – have carefully selected qualifications for key stage 4 pupils to ensure that they meet pupils' needs. New qualifications – such as GCSE biology and a BTEC National Diploma in vocational studies – are extending the range of courses that pupils can follow. The curriculum is further enhanced by opportunities to take part in residential visits, such as to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and skiing in the Alps. As a result of the curriculum design and good teaching, pupils are either returning to mainstream secondary schools or completing their studies at the school, achieving good outcomes.
- In the primary unit, judicious thought has been given to the structure of the school day and the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Topic work – for example about the tropical rainforests – carefully integrates geography and science with reading and writing skills. As a result, pupils are making good progress. Those who have missed schooling are catching up quickly and so are increasingly returning to mainstream schools.
- Staff have taken creative approaches to ensuring that older pupils are well prepared for working life. Partnership working with Dartmoor Zoo engages pupils in practical projects on the zoo site that require pupils to apply their learning in mathematics and science. Teaching staff also use pupils' experiences to provide stimuli for their writing.
- The information about the curriculum on the school's website is very limited.

Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors are unclear about what their children are learning beyond English, mathematics and science.

- The standards in English and mathematics were found to be good at the inspection in April 2015. The progress pupils made in science was not found to be strong. Leaders have tackled this robustly. Across all subjects, trust and school leaders have developed a sophisticated initial assessment when pupils join the school. Consequently, teachers have a detailed understanding of the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. They use this to plan learning to compensate for these deficiencies. As a result, standards in English and mathematics have been sustained. With the increase in the range and level of demand of science qualifications and good teaching, standards in science have risen.
- In classes, pupils can articulate their knowledge and understanding verbally, but this is not reflected as strongly in their written work. In work seen across the curriculum, a lack of accuracy in pupils' spelling and punctuation often undermines the quality of their work. Teachers do not attend to this sufficiently. The school's work to build positive relationships with pupils is highly effective. However, staff do not make full use of this to ensure that the level of challenge and planning of learning are suitably ambitious. Consequently, some pupils who are capable of working at higher standards are not doing so.
- Leadership across the school has been strengthened at senior and middle leadership levels. The appointment of two appropriately qualified leaders for pupils with SEND has ensured that teaching staff have a clear understanding of pupils' needs and have the strategies and techniques to ensure positive outcomes. The trust's raising standards leaders provide useful – often subject-specialist – input to staff development. The headteacher leads with clear and consistent expectations of both staff and pupils. Staff appreciate this clarity and strength of leadership, particularly around pupils' behaviour. The school's pupil progress subgroup holds leaders to account tightly. It provides the trust board with rich intelligence about the school and ensures that resources are appropriately allocated. Throughout the inspection, the moral purpose of the trust – described by the chief executive officer (CEO) as 'Education is the vehicle to a pupil's success' – was seen in all of the school's work.
- The school's provision for supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health has been a key priority for the school since the previous inspection. The range and quality of the therapeutic provision are impressive. The strong relationships staff have with specialist agencies ensure that pupils – and often their families too – receive rapid intervention. The work of independent counsellors, mentors and advisers is reducing pupils' anxiety and leading to fewer incidents of misbehaviour and reducing the need to exclude pupils. Staff pursue their concerns with local agencies to ensure that pupils receive the support they and their families need. SEND leaders have been successful in applying for education, health and care plans for pupils who need additional support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching staff deepen pupils' understanding to ensure that they make the best possible progress
- teaching staff improve the accuracy of pupils' spelling and punctuation
- parents are fully aware of the content of the curriculum for their children.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Wave multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, senior and middle leaders joined inspectors observing learning in classes and looking at pupils' work. Meetings were held with you, your senior leaders, the teachers responsible for pupils with SEND, a group of subject leaders and the school's improvement partner. I met with the CEO of the trust and spoke on the telephone with a director of the trust board, a member of the school's pupil performance steering group and the assistant vice-principal of a local school who works with the school.

Inspectors observed pupils in classes, at breaks and at lunchtimes. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and their understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own analyses of its strengths and weaknesses, assessment information, risk assessments and staff recruitment checks. They also analysed records related to pupils with SEND.

I considered the views of five parents who responded to Parent View, including four written comments. One letter from a carer was taken into account. An inspector spoke with other parents by telephone. No pupils or staff members completed Ofsted's online surveys.