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Mr Sean Cannon
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cannon

Short inspection of Icknield School

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 2019 with Mark Bagust, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your arrival at the school in 2017, you have been determined to build upon the many strengths identified at the previous inspection to make Icknield School even better. You have recently appointed your leadership team and they are ably supporting you to promote and sustain excellence in all that the school does for its pupils.

Warm and mutually respectful relationships are evident right from the start of the school day. Although many pupils are non-verbal, you do not let this prevent pupils' voice from being at the heart of the school's work so that they can contribute to ongoing improvements in provision. Through the school council, pupils contribute helpful ideas about what would make the school better. You were able to fulfil their requests to have a wheelchair trampoline and music during hydrotherapy sessions. Pupils are clearly interested in their own learning. Inspectors heard that current sixth-form students would like to do more work in the community, while secondary pupils want more music lessons.

Parents are positive about the school's work. They are delighted to see their children make such good progress, particularly to learn skills that support their growing independence. Typical of many views was the parent who wrote, 'My child has really thrived at this school. The staff have guided my child to achieve all that they can and exceed my expectations.' Parents appreciate the regular electronic updates that teachers send to inform them about their children's progress. Effective

communications between home and school ensure that absence is kept to a minimum and is only for medical reasons. Parents told inspectors that their children miss being at school in the holidays. Pupils' attendance is above average when compared to other schools nationally.

Leaders promote the very highest expectations for everyone on both school sites. You lead a highly motivated staff team. As a result, staff are fully involved in the school's current development priorities and excited by leaders' plans to enhance still further the school's offer. Staff say that they have access to training and support from colleagues to keep their professional skills up to date.

Following the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve outdoor provision for children in the early years. Pupils in the lower primary class, including early years children, have a well-equipped outdoor area with many resources to help them learn through play. Children use it often, and they are familiar with the resources and opportunities it provides to help them learn. When we visited the class, we saw many children concentrating on their chosen outdoor activity. Adults skilfully supported children to develop their interests and practise new skills. Some children selected number activities, while others enjoyed the books, the sand tray and the climbing apparatus.

Inspectors observed pupils' enthusiastic responses to lessons that challenged them to think hard. Pupils tried consistently hard with their learning, working well to overcome the complex difficulties that they face. Pupils in the primary classes learned phonics, matching sounds to words and pictures. In a sixth-form lesson, students wrote and performed a valentine song. Through persistent repetition, patient support and carefully devised learning tasks, pupils acquire skills, develop confidence and make strong progress from their very low starting points.

Almost all governors are new to the school. They bring a wide range of skills and expertise from the outside world. Governors are committed to their roles and they already demonstrate an accurate understanding of their responsibilities. They ask leaders probing questions to hold them to account for key areas of the school's work. Governors are currently taking an active role to familiarise themselves with the school so that they can support and challenge you to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can. As a new team, the governing body is already making use of available training, both as individuals and collectively. Governors need to ensure that their growing knowledge of the school helps them to use information strategically.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's caring ethos supports leaders and governors to prioritise keeping pupils safe. A team of designated leaders for safeguarding ensures that everyone is comprehensively trained, and they provide regular updates. As a result, all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Equally important is the school's very thorough approach to the administration of the medications that many pupils require.

Staff know each pupil in detail, and this helps them to be alert to any signs or concerns about safeguarding. They record these on the school's electronic system and designated leaders follow up systematically by working with parents and, where necessary, by alerting other professionals. The school's family-support practitioner helps pupils and parents at an early stage of need, and they appreciate her expertise.

Parents overwhelmingly say that their children feel safe in school. Everyone gets on well together and staff develop pupils' social behaviour, helping them to form friendships. There are no incidents of bullying, and pupils never hurt others with any intent. All staff are specifically trained to de-escalate incidents and support plans are in place for pupils whose behaviour requires particular consideration. Keeping safe is an integral part of the school's curriculum. This is a priority for sixth-form students, so that they develop the independence that supports them into adulthood. Leaders recognise that the use of the internet presents a particular threat to pupils with severe learning difficulties. Pupils like to use it but do not understand its content. Staff help pupils to learn how to be safe when they are online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors followed two lines of enquiry in order to find out about specific aspects of the school's work. First, we reviewed how well leaders ensure that pupils achieve the best outcomes that they can. As part of this enquiry, we also explored with leaders the effectiveness of the school's curriculum, which is the school's current improvement priority.
- Until the end of July 2018, teachers reviewed pupils' learning at key points during the school year and recorded progress numerically. This enabled you to look at pupils' performance compared to other pupils nationally with the same starting points. Using this means, your pupils made outstanding progress to meet or exceed challenging targets. You wisely decided that this information did not provide meaningful information to support individual pupils with their learning. Having researched the best practice that is available nationally, leaders are introducing a new way to evidence pupils' learning by recording achievement as it happens. Once established, you will have a clear and easily retrieved overview of each pupils' rate of progress across the seven strands of learning that comprise your curriculum.
- The school's curriculum engages pupils well, meets their needs and helps them to prepare for their future life. Pupils enjoy a wide range of interesting lessons that are practical in nature and stretch their skills. Learning is enlivened by activities that take place off-site, including inspiring opportunities for sport, drama and adventurous pursuits. You, your leaders and teachers are committed to ensure that the curriculum meets individual needs to an even greater extent than it already does. You intend for it to be built around each pupil's individual abilities, interests and development needs and fully take into account their own 'wants'. The aim is to personalise the curriculum and adjust it in line with each pupil's progress, so they are equipped as well as possible for their future. Leaders have worked with staff and everyone in school is committed to the careful adaptations

that you want to make.

- Leaders' high-quality plans to promote a pupil-led curriculum are currently at an early stage of implementation, although there is early impact from this work, particularly in the sixth form. Learning activities are well matched to students' needs and support them to focus on their futures. Where appropriate, students successfully access college placements and achieve accreditations. Others require highly personalised support to learn the most basic experiences, such as how to cross a road safely or visit a shop to buy an item.
- Your priority to revise the curriculum and generate meaningful information about pupils' achievement is rightly ambitious. Leaders and governors have not thought carefully enough, however, about how or when you will evaluate the impact of the planned changes on pupils' learning and development. You have not considered how leaders will analyse and use new information about pupils' progress.
- In our second line of enquiry, inspectors wanted to find out how well teachers ensure that pupils' individual needs are met, including disadvantaged pupils, and your school's most able pupils. There are no discernible differences between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and that of other pupils with similarly low starting points. You use additional funding effectively to provide access to additional teaching, experiences or family support, in line with identified needs.
- Although there is a temporary gap in the strategic information that leaders hold about pupils' collective performance, teachers know the details about each pupil's learning and wider development. They review this information daily, considering needs relating to pupils' cognition, communication, personal care, hygiene and independence. Pupil passports and individual plans ensure that all adults focus precisely on what comes next.
- Communication is consistently well developed across the school. Pupils in the lower primary classroom have quickly become proficient users of picture exchange, for example by asking at snack time, 'I want 10 raisins please.' Symbols and objects of reference effectively support all pupils to communicate, but especially those with limited verbal skills. Creative multi-sensory approaches stimulate pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Through a variety of means, staff members help pupils to make choices and communicate feelings. In a painting session, pupils engaged with the activity by responding to the different stimuli of smell, touch, sound, movement and colour.
- Learning activities are well-matched to meet the needs of the most able pupils and teachers challenge them to achieve their best. Parents have noticed an increasing focus on academic approaches in recent years, such as in reading and mathematics. In a secondary classroom, pupils looked at the classification of animals. The content stretched the most able pupils' thinking but it was skilfully adapted for pupils whose learning needs were complex.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the impact of planned refinements to the curriculum are evaluated sharply to:
 - ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable
 - inform the school's ongoing development priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Jacobs
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We visited all classes on both school sites, accompanied by senior staff. We observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and on entry to school. To investigate the school's work, we held meetings with senior leaders, governors and school staff. The lead inspector met a representative of the local authority.

We reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's website, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's development plan. We examined the single central record of recruitment checks and information about pupils' progress and we looked at safeguarding procedures and arrangements. We considered 53 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 12 text messages and a note that a parent sent into the school. Seventeen responses to the staff survey were taken into account. The lead inspector also met a number of parents at the start of the school day.