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Mrs Yvonne McCall
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McCall

Short inspection of Castle Wood Special School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2019 with Susan Lowry, 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 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.

You and your staff have created a very happy school where pupils enjoy learning. Everywhere around the school, pupils are smiling, enjoying the warm relationships they share with staff and relishing the progress they are making. Though many pupils in the school have particular needs that can make their behaviour challenging, pupils' behaviour is excellent because staff help pupils manage their anxiety effectively.

You introduced a new curriculum in September 2018. This new curriculum is being tweaked as you use it for the first time, but already you are seeing its increased effectiveness. It gives your highly skilled staff the flexibility they need while making leaders' high aspirations for all pupils very clear.

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly challenging to secure services for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and pupils' mental health needs in your area. Some parents and carers express concerns about this. While you would prefer to be able to engage external professional health services, you and your staff have been proactive, thought carefully about your pupils' needs and introduced many changes that have supported pupils' communication development, physical development and well-being. Some of these changes have had a significant positive impact on pupils. This has placed extra

pressure on staff. However, the vast majority of staff say that leaders take appropriate steps to help them maintain a reasonable workload.

Your school is well respected and seen as a centre of innovation by partners in the university sector. Your school's work on teacher training was described by one external partner as having a: 'long-term impact towards better outcomes for disadvantaged children across the region' and by another as a: 'beacon of good practice for the next generation of teachers'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all the systems for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Records are kept securely and relevant checks on staff suitability are in place. Leaders for safeguarding are well trained and alert to the particular vulnerabilities of children in their care and the risks in their locality. When staff have to deal with safeguarding issues, they do so with urgency, competently and by tenaciously requesting support from external agencies. Staff have had appropriate training and understand their role in safeguarding pupils.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have introduced a new curriculum that makes clear the equal emphasis on pupils' academic, social, personal and physical development. Underlying the curriculum is the adamant belief that all pupils, regardless of their need, can experience a wide, varied and complete curriculum. The way that leaders have designed the curriculum gives staff professional freedom, meaning that they can meet individual pupils' needs very well. In lessons, staff watch pupils' responses carefully and continually shape learning to meet their needs. As a result, pupils make very strong progress in all areas of their learning.
- There are many highly skilled staff employed across the school who demonstrate a deep understanding of pupils' learning and individual needs. During the inspection, inspectors had many conversations with staff where they explained the careful thinking and planning they do to support pupils' progress. Leaders encourage staff to take control of their own professional development and give them the time to do this, which contributes to high standards of provision across the school.
- Lessons in outdoor spaces have the same status as lessons inside. When outdoors, staff have the same high expectations and attention to detail in their teaching. In the woodland classroom, for example, the outdoor resources are used to significant effect. Pupils are engaged in exciting, challenging and often very messy activities. Staff carefully structure these to encourage pupils' progress, instigating conversations with pupils about their work. They get pupils to try out new vocabulary, explain their thoughts and extend pupils' ability to cope with a highly stimulating outdoor environment.
- As a result of excellent leadership of provision for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder, these pupils are making strong progress. The whole school is a vibrant and interesting place, and this is highly challenging for many pupils who

have sensitivity to over-stimulating situations. Staff work effectively to reduce pupils' anxiety, have clear routines, carefully manage lesson changes and consistently respond to pupils' emerging needs. As a result, these pupils are increasingly able to manage in the busy environment. This prepares them very well for their next steps in learning and life after school.

- In response to limited access to mental health and physiotherapy health services, leaders have invested heavily in training staff to improve all pupils' mental and physical well-being. They have planned strategically for this, training staff well in things like de-escalation of pupils' anxiety and high-quality communication. Regular, well-planned and monitored physical activity specifically designed to develop and maintain pupils' mobility has had a marked impact on many pupils' physical flexibility, independent walking and enjoyment of movement.
- Governors are also acutely aware of the issues with access to speech and language therapy and parents' concerns about this. In response, leaders have honed the skills of all members of staff so that they develop pupils' communication in as many opportunities as possible. Overall, this is going well. Inspectors saw a range of examples of staff expertly and persistently supporting pupils' wide range of communication needs, using special equipment, communication books, encouragement of speech and signing. Pupils who have particular needs in developing communication are making progress in this area. However, a handful of staff do not do this as well as the best, because they are not as persistent in their interactions with pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to refine the new curriculum as it becomes embedded
- all the in-class support for pupils' communication development matches the quality of the best in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors spoke with parents and pupils as they arrived at the school, visited a range of lessons, and scrutinised pupils' work and the new curriculum. A meeting was held with pupils and another with staff.

Inspectors met with leaders and governors and spoke with a representative from the local authority. They observed pupils' work in the outdoor spaces, including the woodland classroom area, and scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems.

There were insufficient responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, for inspectors to evaluate these. They took note of two written comments from parents, and the 40 responses to an anonymous staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.