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Mr Adam Booker
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Dear Mr Booker

Short inspection of Applefields School

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 2019 with Ofsted Inspector Mark Dent, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since taking leadership, you have developed many areas of the school, including safeguarding procedures, assessment methods and the curriculum. You are passionate and have a clear vision for the future of the school, which is understood and supported by staff. This, combined with the support of your newly emerging senior and middle leadership teams and governing body, ensures that the school is moving forward and has the capacity for continued improvement.

At the time of the last inspection, opportunities were being missed to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly within the teaching and curriculum for mathematics. You have ensured that the curriculum, not only in mathematics but as a whole, has been reviewed and developed. The newly introduced curriculum is more pupil-centred and supports individual planning and assessment effectively. As a result, most pupils are making strong progress against their individual targets in all subjects.

The school's self-evaluation of its overall effectiveness and plans for improvement are clear and appropriate. For example, the plans identify further ways to improve the school, its curriculum and teaching to meet the changing needs of the cohort of pupils being referred to the school. Improvements since the start of the academic year can be seen through the work of the well-being team and the ongoing changes

to the curriculum.

Pupils' transitions into the school are successful at Applefields. Pupils from the primary special school in York visit the Pip Stop Cafe. Staff from Applefields School undertake outreach visits to the primary school, along with a group of Year 7 pupils, to run joint physical education sessions. This ensures that transitioning pupils are aware of Applefields School's teachers and pupils, and supports them to settle well into the school as it reduces anxiety for both the pupil and parent or carer.

Systems to manage pupils' behaviour are effective and staff understand the necessity of using these consistently. Staff's strong knowledge of the pupils helps the pupils to be calm and settled. For example, during the inspection, a pupil who had become hot following a physical activity was taken for a short walk outside to cool off before coming back into the classroom and settling back into his learning activity quickly. Pupils are also well supported to manage their own behaviour. They appreciate the well-being room and one pupil said, 'Whenever I feel stressed, I always talk to someone.'

The sixth form is a strength of the school. The school effectively develops students to be confident and articulate young people. Students know they have to leave the school and are confident and excited to move to the next level in their education. Students are proud of what they are achieving and enjoy talking about their school life with visitors. The curriculum offers a range of opportunities to learn life skills such as money management, alongside English and mathematics. This wider curriculum provides good opportunities to build students' independence, such as work experience in a variety of settings, including a supermarket, council offices and a city centre hotel.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and detailed records kept. The designated safeguarding and deputy safeguarding officers are knowledgeable, both in relation to safeguarding training and the pupils within the school. Across both sites, the safeguarding team works effectively to support and manage pupils who have complex issues and report these to the local authority when necessary.

The wider staff team has a positive grasp of safeguarding issues and understands the risks to their pupils. They are vigilant for signs of distress, agitation and any possible neglect or abuse. They are confident with the safeguarding policies and procedures of the school and know how to record and report any concerns effectively.

Pupils say, and parents agree, that they are safe in the school. You ensure that there are ongoing opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe through the wider curriculum. As a result, pupils are confident in a wide range of situations, feel safe and can articulate how to keep themselves safe outside school, for example when online. When asked about safety, one pupil said, 'Grown-ups

teach us how to be adults.'

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked at whether the quality of teaching remains good and leads to pupils making good progress. Your revised curriculum and subsequent staff training have helped to ensure that teachers plan even more effectively to meet the needs of individual pupils. A personalised education is available to all.
- Teaching is good and continues to improve, and pupils are making good progress. Teachers and leaders know individual pupils extremely well. They can clearly articulate each pupil's needs, the progress they are making over time and any barriers to learning they have. The targets set for what pupils should achieve are linked to both their individual education, health and care (EHC) plans and teachers' assessment of their academic and social needs. Learning tasks and classroom activities develop pupils' skills linked to these targets effectively, for example motor skills, social skills and communication.
- Pupils who attend the Applefields School satellite site at Manor CE Academy value the provision and education that they receive. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to both schools. One pupil said, 'The balance is just right.' Strong teaching focuses on what each pupil can do and needs to know next to continue to successfully access the mainstream curriculum.
- The Pip Stop Cafe excellently showcases the school's real-life approach towards learning. Pupils take part in activities such as baking and serving and handling money, practising their skills on one another. Pupils, staff and parents are all, rightly, proud of this provision. Parents who visit the cafe say it is a 'great opportunity for parents to support each other'.
- Leaders ensure that, when pupils join the school, their skills, knowledge and understanding are accurately assessed. From this, learning is planned so that it builds effectively from this starting point. Each individual pupil's progress is measured effectively through the school's assessment systems and targets within their EHC plan. Although leaders make accurate judgements regarding the progress of individual pupils, this system does not provide leaders with an overarching, whole-school picture of pupils' progress. Doing so is now an important next step.
- Inspectors also looked at pupils' behaviour and attendance. Across the school, in the main, pupils behave well. Classrooms are calm learning environments. Pupils are encouraged and supported to engage with their learning. Parents and staff report that behaviour is managed well and pupils also say that behaviour is good. While leaders ensure that any incidents of poor behaviour are appropriately recorded, these are not yet effectively reviewed to establish a clear and accurate whole-school picture.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. Leaders have developed effective systems to encourage good attendance. In this school, persistent absence is often due to the complex medical needs of pupils. Sometimes, this involves long-term hospital stays. Leaders have taken effective steps to reduce the number of absences due

to illness, such as providing visual reminders to parents and flu vaccinations for staff. When pupils are absent for long periods, staff continue to provide effective support for pupils, and their families, up until they are well enough to return to school.

- Improvements in senior and middle leadership have been a focus for you since coming into post. You have brought together committed and passionate individuals who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience into the leadership team. You continue to work on developing a team approach and a shared vision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- senior and middle leadership is further developed into a cohesive team with a shared vision
- arrangements to check pupils' progress and behaviour are further developed so that they provide a more accurate picture across the whole school.

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

Yours sincerely

Tricia Stevens
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, senior leaders and middle leaders. Meetings were held with a group of pupils. An inspector spoke with parents at the Pip Stop Cafe. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors visited the main school and the satellite provision, housed at Manor CE Academy, and observed pupils arriving at school, during learning and at break and lunchtime. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, responses to Ofsted's questionnaire to parents (Parent View) and staff surveys. They also reviewed the school's records of checks made on the suitability of adults to work with pupils.