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Mrs Georgina Ellis
Headteacher
Churchill Special Free School
Chalkstone Way
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Dear Mrs Ellis

Short inspection of Churchill Special Free School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 2019 with Susan Cox, 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 July 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 are an exemplary leader who has great determination and passion to always do your best for the pupils in your care. You have not been complacent and are always looking for ways to improve the quality of education in the school. Your vision and dedication, alongside your organisational skills, enable you to create a team of staff who share your drive to prepare your pupils for the future. Leaders and staff are dedicated to providing pupils with the skills, confidence, resilience and independence to move on to the next stage in life. Inspectors saw a wealth of evidence to demonstrate how you and your team remain solution-focused and forward-looking. You and your team continually search for innovative ways to improve the provision for your pupils.

The school is a very calm, caring place, where pupils feel comfortable and able to deal with any difficulties and previous negative experiences of education. Pupils appreciate the chance they have to improve their knowledge and skills in such a supportive environment where all staff care and understand them. As one pupil stated, this is 'a high-functioning autism paradise'. The ethos of high expectations is woven into every moment of the school day. All staff, including office staff, midday staff and teaching assistants, have positive interactions with pupils that are welcoming, polite and warm. Pupils learn how to make the most of their time in the school. They improve their learning skills and successfully transition to the next stage in education.

You and your staff know and understand pupils' individual needs exceptionally well. Pupils recognise that staff have high expectations of them academically and socially. Staff effectively develop pupils' ability to express themselves and manage their emotions. As a result, pupils are extremely polite, caring and able to express their views in highly articulate ways. Parents and carers are very complimentary of the school and recognise the changes the school has made for their child. As one parent stated, 'This school is amazing and my child would not be achieving what they are without it or the staff here.'

Leaders, governors and trustees have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness and its areas for improvement. Leaders use a range of outside agencies to check the work of the school. You and your leaders have built on the school's many strengths and have very recently gained the National Autism Society Award for creating an autism-friendly provision. The governors and trustees help by challenging you to ensure that leaders' actions benefit the pupils. They are all involved in monitoring aspects of the school's work. Governors and trust leaders also check pupils' progress regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You, your staff and governors take your safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. Everyone is aware of the vulnerable nature of your pupils, in the school and in society, due to their difficulties with communication and understanding social situations. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect pupils from potential risks, while enabling them to protect themselves and be resilient when difficulties arise.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, records are meticulously kept and any concerns are followed up tenaciously. You, as designated lead for safeguarding, ensure that all staff receive high-quality training and timely updates on keeping pupils safe. Staff are highly vigilant and quick to notice any changes in behaviour. Staff are also sensitive to any potential concerns and act appropriately when they arise.

Pupils and their parents state that they feel that the school is a safe place. Pupils are able to speak clearly about aspects of keeping themselves safe, including an understanding of the effects of drugs, e-safety, knife crime, criminal exploitation and different types of bullying. They state that bullying is rare and they know how to ask for help or whom to go to if they are concerned.

Inspection findings

- Your dedication and drive for improvement help your school to be seen as a 'flagship' for the trust. Leaders are innovative and outward-looking and find ways to improve the school. You find ways around any barriers to improving the provision. All staff feel committed to the vision of an ever-improving school and appreciate the continued professional development to help them in the journey. For example, you have created your own team of specialist subject teachers rather than rely on using subject specialists from other schools in the trust. This has improved pupils' access to specialist subject knowledge and has enhanced their learning and examination success.

- I looked carefully at how well the school prepares pupils and families for pupils' next steps in education or employment. This aspect of the school's work is exceptional and given a very high priority. Social and emotional learning is integrated seamlessly into the everyday life of the school. Pupils rapidly grow in self-esteem and confidence. They develop an understanding of the way the world works and how to interact with others with confidence, respect and self-assurance. Pupils are given the skills to communicate their feelings appropriately and learn to regulate their emotions to allow them to succeed in society. This work is enhanced by the therapeutic team of speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and other specialist staff, such as leaders of independent careers advice and guidance.
- The transition of pupils out of the school is planned meticulously. There are many visits to relevant local colleges to enable pupils to move nearer to their home community. The selection of specialist external courses is completed carefully with discussions involving parents and pupils to enable success to be maintained. This support continues after pupils have moved on, and regular checks are made until the transition is successful. Where difficulties do arise, pupils are supported by specialist staff from the school to help overcome any barriers to success. Transition arrangements for pupils moving on after Churchill Special Free School are extensive and effective.
- Parents are highly supportive of the work of the school, and you have made exceptional efforts to include them. The parent app keeps them up to date and signposts many to support groups and help outside of school. You arrange different styles of consultation meetings to include parents in the success of their pupils. For example, you hold coffee mornings in different localities for those parents who live far from the school. The vast majority of parents say that they feel highly valued and included.
- The curriculum is constantly adapted to ensure pupils' success in core areas of English, mathematics, science and personal development. Pupils access a wide range of activities and subjects, which enhances their learning and leads to success. Those who are able take part in external exams, such as GCSE, BTEC and other accreditations, where appropriate. Some pupils are able to access teaching and facilities at the mainstream secondary school which shares the same site and is part of the trust. They are supported very well by school staff. The school's enrichment programme is a real strength and broadens pupils' learning beyond the traditional subjects, allowing them to work in mixed-age groups, developing social skills and independence in a range of settings and subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the school maintains the exemplary quality of education.

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

Yours sincerely

Jackie Mullan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, my colleague and I met with you and your senior and middle leaders, governors and the chief executive officer of the trust. We scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the record of checks completed on staff. Joint lesson observations with leaders were undertaken, with visits to most lessons and enrichment activities. During these visits, we observed pupils' learning, spoke with pupils and looked at their work. We spoke informally to pupils throughout the day, including at break and lunchtime, as well as meeting formally with the school council to obtain their views of the school. Documents were scrutinised, including information about pupils' progress, the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, reports from outside agencies, records of pupils' attendance and information relating to the work of the governing body. I took into account 22 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's parent questionnaire, 21 free-text messages written by parents and 26 responses to the staff questionnaire.