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Ms Merja Paakkonen
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Paakkonen

Short inspection of Breakspeare School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2017 with Paul Copping, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Since then, you have been appointed as headteacher and the school has recently become part of a federation of two schools with a joint governing body. You, together with the deputy headteachers of each school, form a very effective team and provide strong leadership. Your drive, ambition, vision and actions are inspirational. You have focused on building the capacity of the highly respected leadership team so that it has even greater impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You and your staff have built a wonderful culture in the school which celebrates pupils' successes. Staff know their pupils incredibly well and make the most of every opportunity to help pupils to learn. Outcomes are very strong across each phase of learning. Together with your staff, you have created a vibrant, welcoming, caring school which is evident the moment you step through the door. Corridors are full of colourful eye-catching displays, stimulating a curiosity for learning. Well-established routines ensure that the atmosphere in class is calm and purposeful. Teachers' consistent guidance ensures that pupils feel safe and understand what is expected of them.

The staff's skill in teaching autistic pupils enabled the school to achieve the international quality standard, Autism Accreditation, in 2016, alongside numerous other awards.

Leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the school's performance. You seek external views to ensure that your judgements are correct. This means that your school's self-evaluation rightly celebrates all that is working well and does not shy away from areas that leaders wish to develop further. You want the very best for your pupils.

You work closely with external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Pupils enjoy coming to school and trust the adults caring for them. Behaviour in and around the school is excellent. Pupils show respect for staff, and for one another, and very strong relationships are clear to see.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. The vast majority are happy with the standard of education and the quality of care you provide. One parent commented, 'This school is incredible. I am so pleased that we found this school for our child. We couldn't cope without them.' Another said, 'Breakspeare is an amazing school.'

The recent federation of Meadow Wood with your own outstanding special school is working very effectively. The representatives from the governing body I spoke to have a clear understanding of their strategic role and fulfil it very well. They hold the school to account, challenging it to improve even further. The governing body is passionate and knowledgeable. Governors come into school often, joining training to make sure that their knowledge remains up to date, and visit celebration events to applaud the success of pupils.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to identify and share particularly excellent practice in teaching and learning to support further all recently appointed staff in becoming outstanding practitioners. Leaders have ably tackled this area for improvement. Internal professional development opportunities to observe outstanding teaching, and regular meetings with a nominated mentor, allow new staff to reflect on their own practice. However, you rightly acknowledge that the school needs to further embed the new assessment system, thereby supporting the possibility of even better outcomes in the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are extremely thorough. Robust checks are carried out to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. When new members of staff join the school, discussion about safeguarding is built into their induction. Leaders and staff recognise the additional safeguarding risks that pupils may face because of their disabilities. Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe. Leaders ensure that appropriate information is delivered through the curriculum, throughout the key stages. Staff maintain high levels of supervision at all times, ensuring pupils' welfare and safety. All staff whom inspectors spoke to were clear about the processes and procedures they had to follow. Record-keeping is meticulous.

All policies and procedures are regularly updated. Safeguarding training is thorough. Staff are well informed about national concerns such as radicalisation. Training includes regular updates and briefings to maintain vigilance.

The school's attendance is only below the national average because of the severe medical needs of pupils. Staff are fully aware of the connection that could exist between poor attendance and safeguarding. Excellent procedures are in place for pupils who fail to attend school.

Staff ensure that pupils are fully supervised at the beginning and end of the school day. Leaders check pupils' safety carefully as taxis arrive and leave the school site.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry, in order to ascertain whether the school remained outstanding, focused on the extent to which the school effectively keeps in touch with parents and the local authority. Parents value highly the support of your staff. Parents are particularly pleased about the strong communication between home and school. Staff make home visits prior to pupils' arrival at the school, and are therefore able to establish the pastoral support required. This close work with families continues on arrival at school.
- Parents and staff make very effective use of your home-school diaries which form a method of communication. The school's website, parents' evenings, parents' workshops, and the parents and staff association (PSA) provide excellent opportunities for staying in touch. One parent stated, 'Our son's education has benefited greatly from the consistent open and honest two-way communication between home and school.' Another stated, 'We consider ourselves to be blessed with a school that listens and constructively responds.'
- You have developed a strong working relationship with the local authority which believes that the school has the capacity to move even further forwards, enhanced by the new Sunflower Federation. You are not complacent in your strive for excellence.
- My second line of enquiry concentrated on the curriculum design and how well pupils are doing from their starting points. Each classroom is organised to maximise pupils' learning and enjoyment, and to engage them fully in the curriculum. Careful consideration is given to pupils' specific needs. Your staff maintain consistently high expectations about work and conduct, and pupils respect and welcome these values.
- The curriculum you have designed, and the effect it is having on pupils, is impressive. You have ensured the right balance in your blend of academic and essential skills. Personalised learning and activities to encourage pupils to become independent is at the heart of the school's approach. The curriculum contributes extremely well to pupils' strong outcomes.
- All staff assess pupils' progress throughout lessons. Information is used to adapt learning activities and plan the next steps in learning effectively. Teaching assistants understand the needs of the pupils exceptionally well. They skilfully

intervene at the right moment to move pupils' learning on and encourage independence, so that they can think and learn for themselves.

- The school's extensive and well-equipped playground areas cater particularly well for pupils' needs. This exciting outdoor place allows for pupils to develop their social skills, sense of adventure and self-esteem.
- My third line of enquiry focused on the communication methods used with pupils. Teachers and support staff take account of pupils' individual preferred communication methods and pay close attention to what they say. As a result, teaching meets pupils' individual needs extremely well. In lessons, pupils have the opportunity to communicate through hand-held computers, signing, touching, facial expressions and eye-gazing technology. No opportunities are lost to develop pupils' communication skills, and this underpins all learning at the school.
- Pupils who need additional help to communicate are supported in several ways. For example, pupils use symbols or photographs when moving from one area of the school to another. Adults routinely use Makaton signing and picture exchange communication (PEC) to ensure that those who have speech and language difficulties can express their needs and desires. As a result, all pupils have a voice to express their wishes and opinion, and to make choices.
- Opportunities to experience life in the wider community are plentiful. Links with local mainstream schools, work experience opportunities and practising everyday living skills in 'The house', an independent living unit, ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to thrive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the new assessment system introduced across the school is fully embedded and its effectiveness closely monitored in order to deepen its impact on teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team member and I spoke with you, senior leaders and other members of staff. I met with several members of the governing body,

including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority. The single central record was reviewed as well as additional safeguarding information. We conducted learning walks in each phase of the school undertaken jointly with leaders. We spoke with parents, pupils and staff throughout the day. We took account of the 19 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 free-text responses submitted by parents online during the inspection. Thirty-seven staff completed the questionnaire. We also viewed the school's own internal questionnaire responses from parents.