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Mrs Anne Clinton
Headteacher
Oaklands School
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Dear Mrs Clinton

Short inspection of Oaklands School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with Karen Matthews, 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 your school was judged to be good in January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You lead with relentless ambition to secure the best possible outcomes for your pupils. You are determined that this ensures that the well-being of every pupil is given the highest priority by all staff, including therapists. Their commitment and enthusiasm for pupils underpin the very strong relationships between staff and pupils. Consequently, pupils are happy to come to school. They clearly enjoy their day, engaging with enthusiasm in the challenging learning and other experiences staff provide. Staff, and parents and carers, are also very positive about all aspects of the school's work.

Leaders monitor all aspects of school life and use information gained from this to identify the school's strengths as well as recognising what needs to be improved. Development planning involves all staff, enabling them to play a full part in school improvement. As a result, leaders have sustained the strengths identified at the last inspection. This has been achieved despite there being more pupils on roll with increasingly complex needs, coupled with new premises and expansion plans. Middle leaders are now effectively contributing to school improvement. They take the views of teachers when evaluating the impact of their work. However, they have yet to make full use of pupils' assessment information in this process.

Instrumental in improving pupils' progress has been the development of a highly skilled workforce through effective training and mentoring. The establishment of career pathways has enhanced the role of classroom support staff which has led to seamless and more effective support for pupils. The specialist teaching assistants, for example, deliver the therapy programmes through the week. This helps teachers to focus on pupils' learning and increases the impact of therapy programmes.

At the time of the last inspection, it was viewed that governors were not systematic in challenging the school's performance. Governance has been strengthened as a result of changes to its membership. Governors now have a wide breadth and depth of skills and expertise. They are proactive in ensuring that they have current and accurate knowledge and insight into the school's effectiveness. They use this information to provide challenge and support when needed at this particularly crucial time in the school's development.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. A strong culture of safeguarding pervades the school because of the high regard given to this by leaders and governors. They have ensured that staff are well trained in safeguarding, care and child protection matters. Staff demonstrate high levels of professionalism for close working with pupils. As a result, pupils say or indicate that they feel safe and secure in school.

There are robust systems in place for checking the suitability of all staff to work with children. Meticulously kept written child protection records provide evidence of swift follow-up and appropriate action. Strong relationships with outside agencies and early action are both effective in supporting these very vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders keep all safeguarding matters under regular review. Any identified improvements are rapidly acted on.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this short inspection we agreed to focus on four areas. These were pupils' progress, the capacity of leaders to sustain and improve the school, pupils' attendance and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements when pupils learn off-site.
- During visits to classrooms we saw well-focused learning tailored to the individual needs of pupils. The engagement of pupils in their learning was high because the work was made accessible and fun for them, while still providing challenge and the fostering of independence. Small steps of progress were evident throughout the school, regardless of pupils' needs or ability. We also found evidence of pupils' strong progress over time through discussions with staff and pupils. Video, photographs and pupils' work, such as in English, mathematics and art, further supported this.

- School assessment information indicates that over the last three years pupils made consistently strong progress. No difference across key stages, educational needs or disadvantaged pupils was evident. School leaders introduced a new assessment system at the start of this academic year. This tailors assessments to reflect the current curriculum and aligns progress tracking more closely to pupils' education, health and care plan targets. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this new system.
- Pupils' attendance overall is below average and attributable to a relatively small cohort of pupils. While medical needs account for some absence, particularly for those who have long or frequent spells in hospital, they are not the only reason. For example, in the autumn term of 2017, delays in the arrangements for local authority transport reduced attendance for a few. In other instances, parents struggle to get their child to school due to their challenging behaviour. Leaders act quickly when pupils' attendance is low, and hence a cause for concern. Regular meetings bring together senior leaders and professionals, including the school nurses, to review concerns and take prompt action. Well-planned family support has had some notable successes in improving attendance rates. The school is diligent in checking the whereabouts of any pupil who does not attend. Governors are also aware of the school's attendance data and check that leaders are doing all they can to improve pupils' attendance.
- You, supported by the deputy headteacher and other leaders, have planned meticulously for the forthcoming school expansion and new premises. Governors are also fully aware of the risks posed by the expansion and new building. They are working effectively with you to check on the ongoing changes, and provide support when necessary. Paramount to the school's approach has been sustaining a high quality of teaching through ensuring sufficient leadership capacity. You have enhanced the roles of the assistant headteachers as managers of different pupils' groups. These have been successful in securing better outcomes and care for pupils. To support high-quality teaching as the school expands, you have developed capacity at middle leadership level. The new middle leader's curriculum team has reviewed the teaching modules to ensure that pupils have every opportunity possible to develop the skills linked to pupils' individual education targets. They have taken teachers' views on the effectiveness of modules. However, they have not checked the impact on pupils' success in achieving these targets to also inform the refinements.
- Every day, several small groups of pupils have opportunities to learn off-site as part of their ongoing academic and personal development. This ranges from supermarket visits, trips to the park, swimming, travel training, work experience and Duke of Edinburgh's award expeditions. It is evident that each event is rigorously risk assessed, including each pupil's medical and behavioural needs. Senior leaders monitor and review all aspects of these off-site visits. As a result, pupils are kept safe.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the work of the middle leaders' curriculum team is developed further to include checking the impact of the teaching modules against pupils' progress toward their individual education plan targets and to inform future refinements.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We worked with you and your deputy headteacher throughout the day. We met with the three assistant headteachers and three groups of staff representing middle leadership, teachers and classroom support staff. I met with three governors, including the chair and I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I also met with a small group of pupils, supported by school staff and representing the full range of educational needs, to gain their views of the school and their learning.
- Short visits were made to all classes to observe pupils' learning, all accompanied by you or your deputy. Where possible, pupils' work was scrutinised. We observed pupils throughout the day. This included their arrival at school, breaktime and the after-lunch leisure time.
- We considered a wide range of documentary evidence, including records relating to safeguarding, assessment information, risk assessments for off-site learning, and the school's self-evaluation and action plans.
- We took account of seven responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 25 responses by staff to their online questionnaire. The team inspector spoke with a few parents at the start of the school day.