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Dear Mrs McCarthy

Short inspection of Castle School, Cambridge

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2017 with Paul Copping HMI, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are an innovative and inspiring leader who continuously seeks ways to improve and enhance provision for all pupils. Staff are right behind you in striving for the best possible outcomes for pupils' academic achievement and in their personal development. They share your ambition unconditionally. Comments in the staff questionnaire are testament to the inclusive, child-centred, community-spirited ethos and the strong values that you and all leaders communicate, believe in and demonstrate. Staff said:

- 'Leaders are approachable, involved and get to know the staff and children, making it feel like we are all part of the same team and valued.'
- 'I love the positive buzz around the school.'
- 'We all work very hard together to get the best possible outcomes for our young people.'
- 'Castle School is a pupil-centred school and teamwork is the key.'

Senior leaders have moved the school forward since the previous inspection, particularly in improving teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' behaviour. The school currently provides for an extensive range of pupils' needs. You have risen to this challenge by revising and redesigning the curriculum and adapting it to meet individual pupils' needs. Leaders have done a sterling job in developing an effective system to check how well pupils are learning. Teachers and teaching

assistants know exactly what pupils already know and can do and what they need to learn next.

From the early years through to post-16, all pupils are stretched to achieve the challenging targets that teachers set for them. Staff have high expectations for all pupils to be as independent as possible in their learning, including the most able and those who have profound and complex medical, physical and/or learning needs. All groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress from their individual starting points, especially in developing their language, communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The senior teacher responsible for this area of development has worked closely with the local authority to make the necessary changes. Effective training for staff has helped them to develop more ways to increase pupils' engagement, involvement and participation in learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are strong and respectful, which lends confidence to their learning and promotes a calm, purposeful, supportive atmosphere in every classroom.

The senior leader tracks each pupil's behaviour and analyses the information to ensure that strategies and approaches to manage challenging behaviour are working and having an impact. His mantra, 'what gets measured gets managed', has proved successful in driving forward improvements. The school development plan that lies at the heart of school improvement work does not have such clear, measurable criteria against which to judge progress towards achieving the targets set. Recording and summarising of information is variable in quality and not entirely efficient in some respects. This makes some management tasks more difficult than they should be.

You have begun to extend the methods and approaches that staff use to communicate with parents and some are having a marked impact. For example, feedback from parents about the end-of-year reports on pupils' achievement are positive and they appreciate the addition of a DVD showing their children learning in action. The recent addition of including digital images of pupils working in the home/school communication books is prompting more comment from parents. Nonetheless, as seen in Parent View, some parents do not feel that the school responds well enough to their views and concerns. The school website does not publish all of the information that the Department for Education requires.

All staff give careful consideration to creating a welcoming and inviting place for pupils to learn. Eye-catching, good-quality displays of pupils' work celebrate their achievements and provide pupils, staff and visitors with valuable information about what pupils are learning. Classrooms and specialist rooms are clean, attractive and well organised. Every pupil's targets are on display so that anyone stepping in to cover a class at short notice knows exactly what pupils are expected to learn next. Pupils take pride in the presentation of their work.

Under your and the deputy headteacher's strong leadership, the school is in safe

hands to continue to develop and improve. Governors support and challenge you in equal measures, fulfilling their duty to act as a critical friend. They are forward-looking and consider all options to ensure that provision is sustainable and meets pupils' needs effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are properly trained to fulfil the role. The designated leads for safeguarding and the safeguarding governor ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and applied consistently.

You have created a culture of shared responsibility for everyone to safeguard pupils. Pupils are listened to and feel safe. All staff receive regular training and updates about safeguarding to ensure that they are kept abreast of any key changes.

You provide staff with helpful guidance and advice on how to record concerns accurately and effectively in writing. Staff comply fully with your insistence that 'if it is not written down, it did not happen'.

The single central record of statutory checks on all staff and adults working with pupils is completed properly to ensure their suitability to work with children. Requirements for recruiting staff are followed carefully.

You ensure that pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the personal, social, health and relationships programme that teachers follow. Impressively, when I visited a classroom with a senior leader, a pupil was quick to alert staff to the fact that I was not known to him.

Inspection findings

- The previous inspection in December 2013 identified three things for the school to work on. These included:
 - raising achievement by ensuring that teachers set tasks for pupils at the right level of difficulty
 - improving behaviour
 - improving communication with parents.
- To determine that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about the impact of leaders' work in addressing these areas for improvement. Our findings confirmed that, across the school, pupils currently make strong progress from their starting points. This includes pupils of all abilities, pupils who have complex physical/medical needs and those, who in addition, are disadvantaged and eligible for pupil premium.
- Staff frequently check and record how well pupils are learning and use the information effectively to ensure that the tasks they set for pupils are not too easy or too difficult. They measure pupils' progress towards their targets using a four-point scale to confirm that their knowledge, understanding and skills are entirely secure before moving on.

- In every class, staff manage pupils' behaviour extremely well. Effective training has empowered them to recognise situations that give rise to challenging behaviour and to understand mental health issues. They have moved away from reacting to incidents and containing behaviour, to an approach that is more therapeutic in finding ways of reducing anxiety, increasing pupils' engagement in learning to promote their well-being and happiness. This is clearly working well.
- To establish the level of parental satisfaction, we looked at 17 responses in Parent View that included written comments. We also talked to a few parents and took into account results from a recent school survey. The very large majority of parents were complimentary about the school and all that it provides for their children. A quarter of the respondents did not think that the school responds well to their concerns or their views about how well their children are learning.
- You are finding new ways of informing parents about their children's learning. Staff are using digital images and film to show them examples of their children learning. These approaches have been well received by parents.
- In examining the school's website, I found that some of the information that maintained schools must publish was missing. This includes some of the information about pupil premium spending and information about pupils' achievement. Some areas of the website that are designed to give parents information about the school are not particularly user-friendly, yet others, such as the information about the curriculum, are extremely informative.
- I looked at a variety of documentation and record-keeping, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, plans for improvement and records kept about pupils' achievement and well-being. I found that these vary in quality and usefulness. You do not consistently set clear criteria to measure accurately how well the school is performing. Some records held about pupils, such as the learning journeys, provide a useful chronology of pupils' achievement: other files are not as well organised.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategic plans for improvement make clear who is responsible for leading actions, who will check for progress and when, and how successes will be measured
- paperwork and record-keeping is of consistently good quality to assist senior leaders in retrieving information and in their strategic planning
- the website provides all of the information that maintained schools are required to publish online
- the school further develops parents' involvement and engagement in working with teachers to improve their children's 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 Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, and other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and a co-opted governor.
- We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement, the curriculum and information about current pupils' learning and behaviour.
- We observed teaching and learning in all classes, accompanied by a senior leader.
- I examined the school's safeguarding arrangements, including records, files and documentation. I met with you in your capacity as one of the DSLs.
- The views of 17 parents who responded to Parent View and 71 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were taken into account. We spoke to a few parents visiting an exhibition of pupils' work after school.
- I spoke to the school's improvement adviser on the telephone.