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Mr Nigel Jones
Principal
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Dear Mr Jones

Short inspection of Milestone Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 22 March 2016 with John Bosley, 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 predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in November 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

You have successfully established a culture that is driven by the school's core moral purpose so that staff work tirelessly together to 'provide expertise to deliver a personalised curriculum for each pupil's learning'. Ably supported by the senior leadership team, you consistently communicate the highest expectations. All staff know their place in delivering a first-class level of provision for the pupils and their families. Consequently, pupils make exceptional progress and achieve outcomes of which they, their parents and the staff are rightly proud.

Since the conversion to an academy, provision has gone from strength to strength. The strategic influence of Leigh Academies Trust has had a significant impact on the culture at the school, which is now rightly more focused on pupils' learning. Your vision to restructure the leadership of the school has been very successful, particularly in meeting the demands of the growing numbers of pupils the school serves. (Milestone Academy is a much larger than average-sized special school with 279 pupils aged 2–19.) This has helped to ensure that pupils and their needs are known exceptionally well by staff.

You recognise the importance of working closely with parents. To this end you undertake regular activities to capture their views and act on them. Despite many examples of how you have used this information to improve provision, parents do not always believe the systems for daily communication are as helpful as they could be, particularly for those whose children are non-verbal.

The strength of your strategic leadership, and that of the local governing board, is evident in the success you have had in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the predecessor school's previous inspection report. For example, pupils now get regular and targeted advice about their career aspirations to ensure they are realistic and achievable.

Work experience is a key element to the curriculum on offer for pupils in key stages 4 and 5 of the school, including sixth form learners. Their work experience directly links to the courses they are doing and the discussions they have had with the careers adviser and parents. This all helps to ensure that the proportions of pupils who go on to sustained education, employment or training is very high and consistently higher than national averages.

Pupils now receive lessons in a number of ways that help them to explore shape, space and measure through real-life experiences. For example, a lesson on construction allowed pupils from years 13 and 14 to solve problems relating to shape, space and measure in laying slabs across a designated area. Students showed very positive attitudes to the session because they are committed to doing well and enjoy the practical aspects of their learning. The session clearly demonstrates the manner in which the curriculum is exceptionally well designed to help prepare pupils for the world of work.

Pupils' outcomes are exceptional. Pupils are rightly very proud of their school and the successes they enjoy. You have rightly identified that the next step for the school is to do more to help other schools develop their practice. For example, you have considered an application to become a teaching school, providing training and development programmes for other schools. You are keen to share what you have achieved at Milestone and recognise the time is right to spread this across the wider community.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are very effective. The vice-principal leads this area of work very effectively. Procedures to keep pupils safe have been successfully established; they are robust and fully understood by all staff. There are clear lines of responsibility for following up concerns. Leaders work closely with agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the support they need if there is risk of harm.

All staff have completed appropriate training for their level of responsibility. This has included training on areas of safeguarding that reflect the most recent statutory guidance published by the Department for Education in 2015. The school's policy is clear, up to date and followed diligently by staff. The open culture you have

established, along with strong teamwork, means that staff know pupils and their families exceptionally well and are very well placed to ensure pupils are cared for and protected.

Pupils believe they are kept safe and this is a view shared by their parents. They report that they are unaware of any bullying, but that they know to tell an adult if they have concerns. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they knew the importance of protecting their own identity and not sharing passwords with friends. As well as keeping themselves safe, pupils report on ways that they keep others safe and how the school encourages them to do this. They are clear about their role as British citizens. This is reflected in the pride shown by one pupil in his discussion about a recent visit to Westminster Abbey to see the Queen.

Inspection findings

- You lead with warmth, compassion and ambition for the pupils, their families and the staff at the school. You, very ably supported by the vice-principal, have successfully pulled all staff together to work towards delivering the school's 'core moral purpose'. Your vision to develop new leaders is being delivered very successfully, as seen in your shared model of leadership.
- The four assistant principals, known as phase directors, work under the direction of the vice-principal to great effect. Together they monitor the effectiveness of their phases to ensure that they deliver personalised curriculums that meet the individual needs of the pupils exceptionally well. Every pupil's needs are considered individually and they all have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The manner in which responsibilities are distributed is very effective. For example, the trust has delegated specific powers to the local governing board to hold leaders to account. Performance management systems are very effective as a result. Staff feel valued and that they have supported opportunities to progress through their careers. They recognise the improvements that have been made since the conversion to an academy and the appointment of the principal. As one member of staff stated: 'The principal genuinely cares about the life chances of the pupils and the welfare of staff.'
- The quality of teaching is extremely effective. Learning is personalised to the specific needs of pupils. Staff have very high expectations and consistently promote pupils' independence and expect them to do as much as possible for themselves. This means the curriculum is enabling for pupils, rather than disabling. Staff teams in classes are highly effective.
- Relationships are central to the success of lessons. Staff support each other's work intuitively and skilfully. All adults, including support staff, add value to learning because they are highly skilled. The use of assessment underpins the success of lessons in helping pupils make gains in their learning. Lessons are adapted and amended in response to pupils'

interactions with what has been planned. This ensures that every moment is skilfully utilised to maximise learning. The use of tactile resources and technology often adds value to learning experiences for pupils.

Consequently, pupils show high levels of engagement and enthusiasm for learning and make very good progress from their starting points.

- The early years is now as effective as the rest of the school. Since the predecessor school's inspection, the school has expanded considerably and now admits pupils as young as two years old. The provision has been reorganised and, supported by the continued strong links with the local authority, significant investment has improved the learning environment for children. Each class now benefits from a qualified teacher to lead learning. Pupils are organised into groups which enable them to access experiences that specifically meet their needs. The improvements reflect the strength of leadership and management of this phase, of the school as a whole and in the strategic direction provided by the multi-academy trust.
- As in other parts of the school, the early years is underpinned by strong assessment and high-quality teaching and learning. Skilled adults ensure that pupils benefit from targeted support and questioning to help them make sense of the world around them.
- The sixth form continues to be highly effective. The curriculum has been extended to provide high-quality experiences for learners to develop their enterprise skills. Links made with other academies in the trust mean that learners benefit from opportunities to work with peers with a broader range of abilities, while building on what they have learned at Milestone Academy. There are strong links between the curriculum they are offered, the career aspirations of learners, the work experience made available and opportunities for work when they leave the school. As a result of all these factors learners are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they review and refine systems for daily communication to parents
- they explore and secure ways to share and influence practice beyond the multi-academy trust.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive Officer of Leigh Academies Trust, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Kent County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the vice-principal and the four assistant principals, two members of the local governing board, including the chairperson, and a group of pupils. They also met with the chief executive officer and deputy chief executive officer from Leigh Academies Trust. Inspectors visited a number of classes, accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe teaching and look at the work that pupils were doing. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school, including when using the dining hall. They considered the responses of 36 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 74 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.