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Mrs Janet James
Headteacher
Marshfields School
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Dear Mrs James

Short inspection of Marshfields School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016 with Sally Garrett, 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 good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Marshfields special school is a good place for young people to learn. The environment is bright and busy. Pupils value their work by putting it on display in the corridors for everyone to see and celebrate. Staff work well together to ensure that the needs of each individual pupil are taken into account when they plan the learning activities and opportunities for them. Your staff are unanimous in their belief that this is a good place to work, where they feel valued and supported and have the opportunities to develop their skills. Your pupils, even those who have just started, say that they are glad they are here and are proud of their school.

The positive relationships that pupils enjoy, with one another and with staff, are apparent in classrooms. Pupils were seen to work happily side by side and to be patient and thoughtful with each other. Pupils trust staff to help them when they ask for it. They believe that staff have their best interests at heart. The calm learning atmosphere means that little time is wasted in lessons. This, along with the broad curriculum on offer, results in pupils getting good opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and to access a range of learning opportunities and experiences. However, staff do not always provide enough opportunities for young people to take more responsibility for their own learning. Sometimes staff offer too much help to a pupil who could, if challenged, complete the activity or task unaided. Pupils also miss out on opportunities to have responsibilities for others, take a leadership role, or take responsibility for planning an activity for their peers, such as facilitating clubs or activities at lunchtime.

Most parents say that the school offers a good range of educational opportunities for their child. These include chances to develop skills in the wider world through trips or visits, and, for some pupils, through work-experience placements, or time working in the school café. Parents highlight that communication has improved. They know how well their child is doing and what they expect to do next. Pupils say that they know this is a good school as time here passes so quickly.

You and your leadership team spend time evaluating what you do well and what you could do to create the best provision for your pupils. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement highlighted in your Ofsted report in 2013. Improvement is particularly evident in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. Pupils are articulate and clear when talking about their school and classroom activities. They use research skills confidently, including safe use of the internet, to model answers for their work, and through reviewing previous work to support their learning. Pupils are encouraged to proofread their writing, with an emphasis on capital letters and full stops. Also, pupils, including the least and most able readers, read aloud in lessons with confidence, fluency and understanding. Classrooms and corridor displays support the school's strong culture of high-quality literacy and celebrate pupils' success in reading. Displays support and demonstrate the use of mathematics outside the classroom. For example, a code-breaking project at Bletchley Park and a shape and space project at Woodfield Millennium Park helped pupils to develop their mathematical skills still further.

Another area for improvement highlighted during the last inspection was to increase the breadth of curriculum for post-16 students. Leaders have developed special courses, designed to take into account pupils' attainment at the end of Year 11 and/or when they join the school. Courses include academic qualifications, work experience and the study of mathematics and English. In addition, pupils are offered activities that develop character skills, attitudes and confidence. For example, they run the St John's Café, a café in the local community, where they prepare and sell cakes as part of their mini-enterprise project.

While much development has taken place since the previous inspection, leaders acknowledge that more work is needed to refine assessment systems still further. This is to ensure that teachers make better use of pupils' prior attainment, social and emotional skills/abilities and ambition, so that activities are set at the correct level. This is to ensure that pupils are fully prepared and able to progress beyond the school within education or employment.

Leaders and staff make good use of the resources they have, both in the buildings and the outside space. However, the school lacks indoor sports facilities, which limits the extent to which pupils' skills in physical education can be developed. Leaders have sought help from the local authority to address this deficiency, and the local authority has plans to make improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding meets requirements. Senior leaders demonstrate secure knowledge and practice and they have systems in place to reflect, review and improve practice. This is particularly evident in how they meet the increasing medical and physical needs of their pupils. Risk assessments are comprehensive for both on-site provision and where there is 'learning outside the classroom'.

The single central record of staff appointments and recruitment checks is well maintained. Staff training is regular and staff have responded to this training well. They are aware of the risks pupils may face and are quick to report any concerns they have about a pupil's welfare or safety. Where leaders receive concerns, they deal with them promptly. Referrals to outside agencies are proportionate, timely and well managed.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that there is nowhere they wouldn't go. They particularly appreciate the range of lunchtime clubs and say that staff help keep them safe if they need extra help. Pupils also say that there is little bullying in the school. They know that if they had any concerns, they would feel confident to report them and that staff would act quickly to make sure that worries were dealt with. The curriculum also enables pupils to learn about how to stay safe. Pupils described how they manage their social network access to ensure that they only communicate with people whom they know and trust.

Inspection findings

- The school's self-assessment is detailed and accurate. The one-page summary makes it easy for others, for example, governors, to understand how well the school is doing. Leaders are able to share its strengths and successes, as well as highlight the areas that they could do even better.
- The development of the new senior team has ensured that leaders have the required range of skills and knowledge to ensure that this school is successful. While some are relatively new in post, they have taken the challenge head on and have quickly made a number of changes. These actions are having a positive impact on the work of staff and ensuring that pupils' outcomes are improving, particularly where teaching was not good enough.
- Pupils make consistently good progress from their various starting points. There are no differences in progress apparent between groups. Leaders ensure that they have lots of information about each pupil and take the time to visit them in their current provision. This, coupled with accurate assessment information, ensures that starting points are well understood. As a result, strategies to help pupils learn are put in place quickly and time is used well.
- Pupils are prepared well for adulthood. Last year, many pupils gained a number of qualifications in a range of subjects. The curriculum pathways offered enable the most able pupils to move on to academic routes at local colleges, or to access alternative providers to gain even more work-based skills.

- Pupils are well supported to develop their self-awareness and social skills. This contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as their academic development. Leaders have rightly identified that they need to measure wider 'soft skills' to ensure that pupils make all the progress they can in developing the skills they will need to move on in their personal lives.
- Governors are well informed through their frequent visits to the school. The time they spend each Friday in the school's community café means that they are able to listen to any concerns that parents, staff and pupils may have. They also visit the school at other times, and the rigorous checks they make ensure that they have an accurate view of the strengths in teaching and in pupils' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that staff:

- provide more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and measuring the progress in this area so that it informs future plans
- make better use of prior attainment, social and emotional skills/abilities and information about pupils' own aspirations to ensure that activities are set at the correct level.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we spoke with the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and an assistant headteacher. We also spoke with a range of pupils formally and informally. We met with members of the governing body, and met with a representative from the local authority. We observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school. Pupils' work and records of learning were also reviewed. Recent progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised. We also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and took account of responses to the school's own parent questionnaire. We also reviewed the responses of staff to the staff questionnaire provided by Ofsted.

During the inspection, we focused on four key lines of enquiry. This included a review of the quality of teaching and learning, a look at the processes and systems that the school uses to keep pupils safe, the role of governors in the school and the involvement of parents and carers in their children's education.