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Ms Kerry Harris
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Harris

Short inspection of Colnbrook School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Helen Bailey, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You took up position as headteacher in September 2015 following the retirement of the long-standing headteacher who had sustained the school as outstanding over a significant period of time. Working with the deputy headteacher, you wisely took time to gain an understanding of the strengths of the school, as well as identifying the aspects of its work you wanted to improve. This reflective approach has sustained the quality of provision and engaged staff in making further improvements. In particular, you have developed strategies to support the development of pupils' communication skills. This is enabling pupils to communicate more effectively and has increased their engagement in learning. Everyone works well together with a commitment to ensure that every pupil will achieve all they can and be well prepared for the next stage in their education.

You have also increased the rigour of the analysis of pupils' achievements. Working closely with staff you use the objectives in pupils' education, health and care plans (EHCPs) to plan finely tuned targets for their learning and personal development. Teachers and pupils use the accessible versions of the targets displayed in the classroom to carefully guide learning and to celebrate when progress is made. Where pupils are not making sufficient progress against expectations you discuss this in detail with staff and quickly make alterations to ensure that pupils are supported well. As a result, pupils' learning needs are met effectively and this enables them to make very strong progress. Their learning and development is further enhanced by the close working relationships established between staff and

the therapists who provide specialist support for pupils, for example in developing speech and language skills.

Colnbrook is a happy school. Pupils arrive enthusiastically in the morning and are warmly welcomed by staff who nurture and support them very well. A range of resources, including a soft play area and a sensory room, are effectively used to enhance pupils' ability to cope with the challenges and frustrations they face in learning. Parents are particularly appreciative of the care their children receive and of the wide range of opportunities they have to extend their experience through, for example, visits to local shops to develop their mathematical understanding, participation in a range of sporting events and involvement in the performing arts. These activities enhance learning in many ways; they support pupils' self-esteem and help them to grow in confidence. Pupils share these opportunities with mainstream pupils and the new relationships they build help prepare them for the next stage in their education. As one parent told me, the school 'takes kids that can't cope and makes them happy learners'.

Behaviour is thoughtfully managed. The school's ethos recognises that pupils' challenging behaviour is a form of communication and staff work hard to understand why pupils respond in particular ways and to de-escalate challenging behaviour quickly. Throughout the school day, including at lunch time, pupils are supported to be independent and to regulate their own responses to different challenges. You have worked particularly hard to enable all pupils to maintain their dignity and to socialise while they eat their lunch. Staff provide sensitive help for pupils with carrying food and eating only when absolutely necessary. The dining hall is a calm and sociable place to be. Playtimes are similarly enjoyable, pupils have a range of resources to help their play and enjoy rewarding relationships with their peers and with staff.

In common with leadership changes, there have been a number of changes to the governing body. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and make sure you and other leaders are both supported and challenged to provide the best education for pupils.

A significant feature of the school's work is the high-quality outreach support provided to other schools. Colnbrook staff work with the local authority to provide training and support for staff in other schools through courses, bespoke support and the provision of advice. The support is extremely well evaluated and has a positive impact on the quality of provision across the local area.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, staff and governors regard pupils' safety as a high priority. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Procedures for ensuring that staff are suitable to work with children are well established. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they understand the signs that pupils may be at risk, and report and record concerns appropriately. Where necessary, referrals are made to external

agencies and you pursue these rigorously to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support and advice they need.

Staff understand pupils' vulnerabilities very well. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through a well-balanced curriculum which addresses aspects of personal safety and e-safety at an accessible level. Staff are vigilant to pupils' needs and their well-being is considered in all aspects of their learning and life in school.

Inspection findings

- To consider whether the school remains outstanding, I identified key lines of enquiry which we investigated during the day. The first of these was to establish whether your expectations of pupils are high enough. This was because I had questions about the methods of assessing progress you use and whether they provide you with enough information about how well pupils are learning. Your evaluation of the progress pupils make is very detailed and you revisit how well they are doing against challenging expectations with staff frequently. Your current assessments show that pupils continue to make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as enjoying learning across the well-planned curriculum.
- To further enhance the procedures in place, you have spent time evaluating the current systems of analysing progress and, with staff, have researched more up-to-date procedures. This is because you have identified that you need a wider, more detailed set of information to ensure that all aspects of pupils' achievement and development are understood. You have effectively drawn on the experience of other outstanding providers and are implementing this new agreed approach next term, using the information you already have to establish new baselines for each pupil's learning and development.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the use of the pupil premium to enhance provision for disadvantaged pupils and ensure that they achieve all they can. Analysis of this is a statutory requirement for the school's website. The information you currently make available was not specific enough so I wanted to check you are using this funding appropriately. The detailed analysis you and staff complete about pupils' progress is used effectively to make sure that the needs of pupils eligible for extra support are met. Funding has been used to improve pupils' ability to communicate using symbols and to provide specialist adult support for the development of pupils' communication skills. There is good evidence to show that disadvantaged pupils particularly have benefited from this approach as well as other pupils.
- You and governors recognise that now that the core elements of improving communication have been addressed for disadvantaged pupils, you need to more specifically identify how the use of funding can be focused on extending their experiences. This is so that you can ensure that they receive the maximum benefit possible from the available funding. You are currently reviewing how best to achieve this.
- Under the previous headteacher, Colnbrook had been judged to be outstanding for a number of years. I wanted to see how effectively transition to your

leadership has been managed and if the previous high standards have been sustained. There have been a number of changes in both leadership and governance. These have been managed effectively and you have enhanced the leadership capacity by appointing assistant headteachers and carefully distributing leadership responsibilities. The changes have ensured that expectations are clear to all and key priorities are quickly addressed.

- You have taken time to engage with and understand the staff, many of whom have demonstrated commitment to the school for a significant period of time. You have recognised their considerable strengths and have made sure that the performance of all staff is managed appropriately and well. All staff have been trained and use the agreed systems for improving pupils' ability to communicate. They also use the detailed procedures you have implemented for evaluating and annotating pupils' work. This means pupils are taught well. They are continually challenged and supported to make good progress. The consistency you have implemented is appreciated by staff who are playing key roles in further developing and improving pupils' interest and engagement in their learning.
- Staff are encouraged to undertake further professional qualifications. They have used their learning and research to enhance their understanding of pupils' needs, for example, autism spectrum disorder, and to lead associated improvements.
- Developing pupils' independent communication skills through the use of new technologies was a priority identified at the previous inspection. Teachers use interactive technology to help pupils understand their learning well. You have also successfully implemented the use of small, portable touchscreens to help pupils communicate. We saw these being used enthusiastically by pupils who would not otherwise be able to communicate or demonstrate their learning well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- processes for evaluating the impact of the use of the pupil premium funding specifically show how well it is enabling pupils to overcome the barriers they face to their learning and personal development
- the new system for assessing pupils' progress is implemented and opportunities are provided for teachers and learning support assistants to discuss pupils learning regularly and so ensure that pupils are achieving as much as they can.

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

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you to discuss the key lines of enquiry identified above. We visited classrooms together, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. We also spoke to teachers and learning support assistants if this did not interrupt pupils' learning. I undertook these visits with you and my colleague with the deputy headteacher. I scrutinised your self-evaluation, notes of meetings and development planning. I also looked at your detailed records of assessment, records of pupil progress meetings and EHCPs. To ensure that I understood whether your expectations of pupils are high enough, I met with a group of teachers and looked at how they plan and shape the learning experience for pupils.

I spoke to the chair of governors and the school improvement adviser by phone and met with a governor, senior leaders and a teacher. My colleague looked at provision in the early years and the curriculum. She evaluated safeguarding and child protection procedures. She also spoke to a group of pupils. I observed behaviour at breaktimes and spent time in the hall at lunchtime.