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Mrs Claire May
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs May

Short inspection of Pathfield School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2018 with Andrew Penman, 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 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. 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.

Children, pupils and students are provided with a rounded and interesting range of experiences and activities. Children have full access to all areas of the early years foundation stage. Highly detailed monitoring of their progress and development enables adults to make sure that they settle in well and get a cracking start to their education.

The flexibility between class groups enables the teachers to assess pupils' needs precisely and provide additional challenge or more support when needed. This is particularly helpful for those pupils with the most complex needs.

The school buildings and outside area provide a suitably stimulating and varied learning environment. Older students have a clear sense of their development into being young adults by being in the Town Station building away from the main school site.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve teaching so that a

higher proportion of pupils make outstanding progress, in particular that all staff make full use of signing to support what they say, where this is needed. These aspects have been addressed fully. We agreed that the strong practice in the school should be shared with the wider education community.

Most parents and carers are very supportive of the work that the school does. Many value the high-quality communication and relationship established between them and the school. However, a few parents reported that they would like more daily information about their children. The staff communicate with parents by telephone, text, email and through the home/school diary. Looking through the diaries I noticed that the amount of information varied between classes. We discussed the reasons behind this difference. We concurred that staff need to check the level of communication that parents expect and to come to a compromise that makes staff workload appropriate, but keeps parents sufficiently informed.

Safeguarding is effective.

No matter what their learning needs or difficulties, children, pupils and students are thoughtfully cared for, and protected by staff.

All staff and those responsible for governance ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the staff work closely with the other agencies to secure the safety and well-being of pupils. The safeguarding team keep comprehensive records. A big focus recently has been on developing and supporting pupils' mental health.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff know what to do and where to go if they have any concerns. Staff receive regular, appropriate training. Pupils are safe and secure in lessons and at social times due to high levels of supervision.

Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and monitored, including by the governing body.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry considered how well staff use different forms of communication, including hand-signing, so that pupils know what they are expected to learn. Staff use a good variety of techniques and devices to communicate with pupils, including signs and symbols. Staff adapt their communication methods skilfully for each pupil. As a result, pupils understand what adults are saying and asking them to do.
- Staff ensure that pupils who have the most complex needs, are 'listened' to. They observe pupils' facial expressions and actions to help detect what they need and what they comprehend. In the daily staff briefing class leaders take it in turns to share and reinforce hand-signing.
- Although communication with parents has greatly improved, a few parents reported that they would like more daily information about their children.

- The next line of enquiry focused on how well school leaders and the governing body check that pupils' and students' progress continues to improve. You and other senior leaders have developed sophisticated systems for tracking pupils' progress. Pupils' targets are carefully constructed so that they are individual to them. Targets are frequently reviewed and adjusted when required to ensure that pupils have the right level of challenge. As a result of high-quality staff training, along with ongoing support, staff make meaningful assessments of all aspects of pupils' learning and development. You and other leaders conduct close monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. You have an accurate knowledge of each pupil's progress. Where pupils are not making the progress expected you ensure that individualised interventions are swiftly put in place so that pupils catch up.
- The final line of enquiry focused on how effectively the curriculum develops pupils' independence and prepares them for the next stages in their education. As with all other aspects of the school, you provide a curriculum for pupils and accredited courses for students which are individualised and highly effective. The dreams, desires and aspirations of pupils and students are the foundation base for their individual learning pathways. Strong, impartial careers advice helps them and their families to consider the best direction for them to take towards reaching their ambitions. Staff ensure that there is no glass ceiling for pupils' ambitions.
- The individualised learning pathways are highly effective. They are carefully designed to have very clear lines of external accreditation to enable the pupils and students to work towards their desired ambition. The external accreditations are blended seamlessly into the pathways, they are not bolted on as an afterthought. The accreditations currently being used range from pre-entry level to level 2. As with the children in the early years and younger pupils, older pupils' and students' progress is constantly and consistently reviewed to ensure that they are appropriately challenged and supported.
- Students are well prepared for life after school. Their work in the Church Café develops work-based learning skills well and increases students' social interaction with other people in the community.
- During our inspection we discussed that other providers could benefit from learning about the high quality of provision that the school provides. We agreed that the school could do even more to share best practice.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- parents are kept sufficiently informed about their child's day in school.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We agreed the timetable and activities for the day. We worked extensively with you and other senior leaders throughout the day. We met with other leaders and members of the governing body. We spoke with the school council and a small group of parents. We scrutinised the quality of children's, pupils' and students' work, talking to them and observing them during the day.

We took account of the 21 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The 28 responses by staff and the 11 responses by pupils to Ofsted's electronic questionnaire were considered. In addition, we took note of the school's questionnaires from pupils, parents and staff.

We considered a wide range of documentary evidence, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation and action plans.