

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Anne Thorne
Headteacher
Longcause Community Special School
Longcause
Plympton St Maurice
Plympton
Plymouth
Devon
PL7 1JB

Dear Mrs Thorne

Short inspection of Longcause Community Special School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 2018 with Katherine Powell, 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders, including governors, are highly ambitious for the school. They are outward looking, engaging in research projects and bringing fresh and innovative ideas into school. Governors provide knowledgeable, secure strategic leadership and have a thorough and deep understanding of the school.

You do not shy away from challenge. You arrange regular reviews that question practice and, as a result, improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are made. For example, you responded with rigour to advice to make some changes to the organisation of teaching and learning for pupils in the primary phase. These improvements are recent, but are already starting to support pupils to develop their confidence and ability to complete tasks with less adult support.

You invest heavily in professional development for staff. Leaders provide regular feedback through collaborative discussion about the quality of teaching and learning. All staff who responded to an online survey agreed that the professional development provided encourages and supports them to make improvements to their work.

You extend learning experiences beyond school by offering residential visits locally and abroad. Large numbers of pupils take up these exciting opportunities to further expand their social skills and confidence towards life beyond school. These, and

other carefully planned learning experiences, continue to ensure that pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. All pupils who provided a view said that staff encourage and help them to be respectful and to treat everyone fairly.

Assessment is well thought out and carefully organised. Staff gather a wide range of information to inform their assessments of pupils using an organised system which captures photographs of work, along with short video clips of learning moments as they happen. Parents and carers are able to access this information, which they say helps them to understand how well their children are making progress, and how to support them with learning at home. Leaders ensure that the information gathered about the progress pupils make is analysed and informs any alterations needed to teaching. As a result, pupils consistently make good progress across the school.

Subject leaders are active in checking the assessments made by staff and they develop their action plans accordingly. For example, the subject leader for mathematics is aware, through her monitoring, that the next development priority is to increase pupils' skills in applying their mathematical knowledge of number to solve real-life problems.

You place how well the school works with parents very highly, as you recognise the benefits this brings to pupils. Some parents are involved with a special family project which helps parents to work regularly in partnership with the therapists that provide support for their children. Through this, and other actions to involve families, parents are overwhelmingly happy with the way the school supports their children and how well they feel involved in the school. They say that they feel welcomed and can approach staff with any concerns they may have, safe in the knowledge that these will be listened to and taken seriously.

You and your team responded robustly to the recommendations in the previous inspection. This asked the school to raise expectations for the most able pupils in key stage 4. Pupils' folders show that the curriculum is now rich, with many opportunities to develop experiences and skills that support pupils to fulfil their aspirations, as outlined in their education, health and care plans. Pupils can now study a wide range of courses that provide recognised accreditation; for example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and GCSE and BTEC courses as appropriate.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding and a rigorous approach towards safeguarding procedures. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and all required checks are completed. Training for staff is thorough and followed up with discussion and checks on the understanding of key themes. Governors ensure that they are well informed about safeguarding issues and they fulfil their responsibilities to check how well pupils are kept safe. Safeguarding issues are kept high profile and are on the agenda for all staff meetings. You recognise the importance of

ensuring that pupils understand how to keep safe while online and have developed an e-safety curriculum that meets the learning needs of pupils.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to look in depth at some key areas during my visit. We explored the focus you have had this year on improving reading, and how successful this has been in improving standards. You chose this as a priority because you and your leadership team have developed a clear aim that pupils at Longcause develop their reading skills to allow them to read words around them when they are not in school.
- Leaders are able to show that pupils across the school make consistently good progress towards this aim. You are rigorous in ensuring that any pupils who are seen to be faltering in their progress receive additional support. The impact of this is that pupils leaving the school are better equipped and more confident to read words and sentences in their environment. You recognise that the next step is to support pupils' understanding of the words they read, through increasing the school's work on vocabulary, and building pupils' comprehension skills.
- We also explored how well the school adapts the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. You have developed a detailed Longcause curriculum. The emphasis is on 'learning for life', developing pupils' communication and social skills, while maintaining a drive to ensure that pupils also develop their core skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- With this framework in place, staff are able to plan activities that match the specific learning needs of pupils. As a result, pupils are interested in their learning, motivated to try hard, and consequently, they make consistently good progress.
- We looked at how you ensure that attendance continues to be good and how well the school manages behaviour incidents. You have developed clear systems to track attendance. Any concerns are quickly noticed and followed up. The team responsible for working with families is skilled at reaching out to parents and offering the support they need. As a result, the numbers of pupils who have low attendance are decreasing.
- You have created clear and firm boundaries and high expectations, which helps pupils to understand how to behave in school. Parents and pupils appreciate the high expectations set. They value that staff look for 'what pupils can do, rather than what they can't'. Leaders provide good support for staff in how to manage behaviour. Serious incidents of poor behaviour are analysed to ensure that lessons are learned. As a result of these actions, incidents have reduced over time.
- Finally, we explored the guidance given to pupils to help them identify their aspirations and to plan paths towards these aspirations. You have developed an overview of the skills and experiences needed to prepare pupils for their next steps beyond school, as appropriate to the ages and needs of each pupil. Partnerships to provide internships have been developed in the local community to broaden these experiences. Some of this work has been in the planning stage

and is now about to be fully introduced across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on reading continues and includes further development of pupils' comprehension skills
- changes made recently to the organisation of teaching and learning in the primary phase is embedded to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning continues to be at least good
- pupils across the school receive appropriate guidance and support about future career paths so that they are well prepared to make good choices about their next steps in education, training or employment.

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

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and other senior and subject leaders. Together, we visited lessons across the school. We scrutinised a range of pupils' assessments and their workbooks and folders. We explored the information you provided about pupils' progress. We looked at a range of documents, including the school's evaluation of its effectiveness, action plans and documents to do with recruitment, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. An inspector met with members of the governing body. Conversations on the telephone took place with two school improvement advisers and a representative from the local authority.

Parents' views were gathered during the day through conversations with parents at the school and from the 19 views on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The 77 views on a staff online survey were considered. Pupils' views were gathered during a meeting with pupils and from the 37 views given on an online pupil survey.