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Dear Mrs Birch

Short inspection of Ifield School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Frances Robinson, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Leaders, governors and staff share a constant commitment to make sure that every pupil does as well as they can. There is no hint of complacency. The ambition for each pupil drives the constant focus on improvement. Consequently, pupils continue to achieve excellent outcomes at the school.

Pupils are in safe hands at Ifield. They are well cared for, secure and happy. Parents and carers value the high quality of care that their children receive. Staff all agree that pupils are safe, happy and well looked after. This can be seen in the confidence of pupils and the positive relationships they have with staff. Pupils rightly trust the staff to take good care of them. This was clear at breaktime, when the skilful and well-planned actions of staff made sure that all pupils could feel safe and enjoy themselves. Parents cannot praise the school enough. They are confident that their children are extremely well cared for and are happy with the outcomes that pupils achieve.

Leaders want every pupil to succeed and are focused on continually improving the work of the school. This can be seen in the current development of provision for students over the age of 19. The school ensures that it has the expert teachers it needs and initial teacher training supported by the teaching alliance it leads and by an alliance of local special schools. Newly qualified teachers are extremely well

supported to develop the skills and expertise they need. They feel encouraged and valued by the school. The school works extensively with other schools, supporting the development of better provision for all pupils into adulthood.

Since the last inspection, leaders have maintained and built on the school's many strengths. The outstanding leadership has been maintained through the changes that have taken place since the last inspection. A new head of school has been appointed. The head of sixth form and executive headteacher have also joined the school. In addition to this, the school has joined with a neighbouring primary school to form The Cedar Federation. This has resulted in a new, shared governing body and an even stronger commitment to inclusion.

Together, leaders have successfully addressed the area identified for improvement in the previous inspection. There is evidence across the school of higher expectations in all areas of learning, including English and mathematics. Teachers expertly track what pupils know in their academic, social and personal learning. Middle leaders have developed to have close oversight of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders closely test and monitor this information to ensure that all pupils get the challenge that they need to make as much progress as possible. The staff work extremely hard to ensure that pupils make excellent progress toward the goals set out in their education, health and care plans. High expectations are visible in all areas of pupils' learning and development. A good example of this was seen in a sixth-form lesson where students were considering their own employability skills. Pupils were able to use very secure English skills to consider and share their thinking. Older pupils have excellent opportunities to learn about work. Supported internships are used extremely well and opportunities for accreditation are sought wherever possible. As a consequence of skilled staff and these high expectations, pupils make consistently outstanding progress from their starting points.

Governors are astute and ambitious for every pupil. Governors understand the strengths in the school and know what parts need to improve. They know the school very well and use the information they receive to expertly hold leaders to account. Their ongoing review and improvement have ensured that leadership in the school remains outstanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Ifield takes exceptionally good care of all its pupils. Staff provide high-quality support that enables pupils to thrive. Pupils are expertly supported to develop the skills and knowledge they need to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online and when crossing the road.

The quality of safeguarding practice is exemplary. Leaders and governors carry out regular checks to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that any concerns about pupils' welfare are dealt with robustly. Important information about pupils is well managed and staff training is thorough.

Governors ensure that their own training is up to date and they take this seriously.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I explored the steps that leaders have taken to ensure that the quality of teaching remains high. The needs of pupils attending the school are changing, with an increasing proportion of pupils with more complex needs now attending the school. This has led to changes in the way that the progress that pupils make is monitored. Staff regularly meet to consider all aspects of pupils' progress. This ensures that all professionals focus on the long-term success for every pupil. The assessment of what pupils understand and can do is detailed and thorough. Learning journals and other records clearly record the progress that pupils make in many areas of learning. The activities that pupils undertake offer excellent opportunities to stretch the learning of every pupil. A good example of this is the chance for pupils to sleep overnight at the school. Staff ensure that interventions and additional programmes are closely monitored so that they lead to greater progress for the pupils involved. For example, Forest School activities are closely monitored to ensure that pupils transfer their learning back into school. As a result, staff have an excellent understanding of pupils' needs and work closely together to ensure that pupils make excellent progress.
- I also considered the school's work to further develop the curriculum, currently being piloted in key stage 3. The current curriculum is strong and offers a very good range of learning opportunities. However, leaders have rightly identified that it could more closely match the needs of pupils. This demonstrates the determination of leaders to continually improve the school. It also shows how leaders are adapting the school to meet the changing needs of pupils. The pilot curriculum is closely matched to pupils' starting points. The curriculum being trialled has been designed to develop the skills that pupils need for life. It is too early to be able to judge the success of this new approach.
- I also examined pupils' attendance as this is lower than might be expected. However, it is clear that the complex needs of some pupils result in higher-than-average absence. Leaders take effective action to quickly address any issues with poor attendance as they arise. Staff work closely with families and other agencies to address any issues that result in poor attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue their work to ensure that the curriculum closely matches the needs and abilities of all pupils.

I am copying this letter to the interim chair of the governing body, the regional

schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Minns
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you and the head of school to discuss a range of issues. Together, we visited classrooms to look at lessons and to watch pupils at work. We also held meetings with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. We also met with a group of newly qualified teachers and a group of staff from key stage 3. Throughout the day, including at breaktime and lunchtime, we carefully observed the behaviour of pupils and the support provided by staff. We met with two groups of pupils to gather their views and looked at 33 responses to the pupils' questionnaire. We spoke to parents at the end of the day and took account of 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including five written comments. We considered 82 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the views of one parent who telephoned Ofsted during the inspection. We reviewed school documentation, including the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding.