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Mrs Antonia Drysdale  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Drysdale

### **Short inspection of St John's School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2018 with Helen Bailey, HMI, 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 September 2014.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

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

You have developed a strong ethos of teamwork in the school and all staff are committed to sustaining outstanding provision. You have focused sharply on strengthening leadership by working closely with your school improvement partner in developing the role of your phase leaders. As a result, school leaders are rigorously monitoring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress across the school. Together with school leaders, you have implemented a new system of self-evaluation which accurately identifies the strengths of the school. However, occasionally there are not enough links made between the outcomes of your monitoring of pupils' work over time, the relative weaknesses identified in pupils' achievements and the priorities identified for improvement in the school development plan.

Staff work very closely with parents and carers. Parents are rightly proud of the school. One parent wrote, 'I've loved this school since the day my child started. It is so well run, and the teachers are wonderful.' This was typical of parental views.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement since the previous inspection, in raising expectations for learning, developing best practice in the early years and simplifying the presentation of self-evaluation for staff and governors.

Your scrutiny of pupils' learning over time and our joint visits to lessons showed that expectations for learning are high. Pupils now take pride in showcasing their own progress over time in their books. The early years curriculum has been strengthened with exciting experiences for children, enabling them to make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. You have also simplified the presentation of data so that governors can see clearly how high-quality teaching is contributing to the outstanding progress that pupils are making over time.

Leaders across the school are driving continuous improvement and are clearly demonstrating the capacity to develop the school further. Since the beginning of this academic year, leaders have developed an outreach service providing advice and support for mainstream schools. The specialist training that staff provide to other schools is held in high regard, although the impact of its work on the learning and well-being of pupils in these schools has yet to be evaluated.

Staff promote exceptionally well the pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is seen in the steady year-on-year rise in attendance and the rapid growth in pupils' self-esteem since starting school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders and governors work closely with parents, health professionals and outside agencies in promoting a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding lies at the heart of the school's work. As result, pupils say that they feel safe and know how to stay safe in school. They move around the school safely and handle equipment safely. Pupils, parents and staff believe that any form of bullying is rare, and should it occur is dealt with effectively.

Leaders thoroughly check the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils and ensure that all training in child protection and safeguarding is up to date. All potential risks to pupils are carefully assessed and effective measures are put in place to eliminate or significantly reduce such risks.

### **Inspection findings**

- To determine if the school remains outstanding, I wanted to find out how effective teaching was in making sure that all groups of pupils across the school, including in the early years, are making outstanding progress. This was because strengthening teaching was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers have developed a strong culture for learning in their classrooms, with high levels of support provided by teaching assistants who focus sharply on meeting pupils' individual learning needs. This strong culture for learning is ensuring that pupils are making outstanding progress from their different starting points.
- Highly effective teaching is also confirmed by the progress that different pupils are making over time, as seen in their work. The school's accurate tracking information shows that all groups of pupils are making outstanding progress,

including those who have autistic spectrum disorder, those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties and those who have complex medical needs. Strong teamwork between teaching staff, health professionals and therapists contributes to this progress, especially in communication and social interaction.

- I also wanted to determine how well the careers education and work-related learning programmes are in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education, as there was very little information about this on the school's website. Pupils in the school and students in the sixth form benefit greatly from high-quality careers advice. This enables them to prepare for leaving school, to develop independent living skills and for their transition to further education, training or day care. The school works closely with an enterprise partnership to develop meaningful experiences for the oldest pupils to enable them to participate in the community and develop their independence.
- Staff work closely with families to plan a very smooth transition from school to further education, day care or training. The transition manager supports parents very effectively in visiting colleges, training providers and day centres with their children and allays any fears parents may have about their child's future. Staff ensure that work experience is matched to pupils' particular needs and takes full account of transition plans. As a result, all pupils transfer successfully to further education, employment, day care or training with most sustaining their places over time.
- Lastly, I wanted to find out how well governors were monitoring the work of the school, including the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning and well-being and in ensuring that the website is compliant. This was because there was insufficient information about pupils' progress on the website and some policies appeared to be out of date. I found that members of the governing body were rigorously holding the school to account for its work. They have a good understanding of the school's tracking system for determining the progress that pupils are making. Minutes of their meetings show that they use this well to ask challenging questions about the rates of progress that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are making. They visit the school and carry out learning walks to obtain their own view of the quality of teaching.
- Governors have also developed a system of the careful reviewing of all school policies to ensure that they are up to date. Since the school became part of the multi-academy trust, governors have started developing the website as they recognise it needs to become easier to access for parents. During the inspection, governors and school leaders checked that the website is compliant with requirements.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement priorities are better informed by school self-evaluation, including analysis of pupil performance and progress, and that these are understood by all staff

- they evaluate the impact of the outreach provision on pupils' outcomes in mainstream schools to enable this to develop further
- they implement plans to develop the website as soon as possible to ensure that it is accessible for parents.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees (academies) and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bedford Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, my colleague and I met with you, senior leaders and phase leaders. We also met with members of the local governing board, representatives of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. We carried out joint visits to lessons across the school, including the sixth form and early years. We also looked at samples of pupils' work. We considered the views of parents by holding telephone discussions with seven parents, examining text message submissions from parents and looking at the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We also examined the 87 online questionnaire responses from staff. I met with a small group of pupils to consider their views and we held informal discussions with pupils about their school. We looked at the school's website and examined a range of documentation, including:

- safeguarding policies and procedures
- records of training in safeguarding and the single central records of checks made on the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils
- the information about the progress pupils are making
- records of the incidents of behaviour and attendance figures
- minutes of governors' meetings
- the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan.