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22 October 2018

Mr Simon Bainbridge
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bainbridge

Short inspection of Highfield Ely Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2018 with Sharon Wilson, 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 your school was judged to be good in October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school joined the Active Learning Trust in September 2016. During the visit, I became aware that the school opened a 19 to 25 provision with a capacity for 10 adults on the Littleport Academy school site in September 2018. The inspection visit did not include that provision. We discussed the need for you to contact the Department for Education about the status and future inspection of that provision.

Your clear vision, drive and unwavering determination have earned you the respect of the governors and the trust. You have created an ethos in the school that promotes pupils' welfare at the forefront. You and the head of school have high expectations and lead by example. You are engaged in a relentless cycle of improvement to achieve the very best. You have the pupils at the centre of all that you do and never believe that your work is complete. You strive to achieve the very best for your pupils and staff. Your staff are dedicated to the pupils, are motivated well by leaders and work effectively as a cohesive team. The vast majority of staff who responded to the staff survey said that they are proud to work at the school, that leaders support staff well, pupils are safe, and they enjoy their work.

Pupils say they enjoy coming to the school. Their positive attitudes make them a joy to talk to. Throughout the school, pupils were engaged in their learning. One pupil stated, 'It's a great school. I don't want to leave. I will be really sad.'

You know your school extremely well. Your self-evaluation summary document is

both evaluative and accurate. This is because you have rigorous systems in place to monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school. For example, you schedule weekly meetings with middle leaders to discuss pupils' progress and how to move forward as a team. You use all this information well to inform your school improvement planning, which is communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

Inspectors identified two areas for improvement when the school was last inspected in October 2014. First, to improve the teaching and learning of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and, second, to raise the achievement of students in the sixth form. Pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties are making stronger progress because the curriculum and teaching are matched closely to their individual needs. Students in the sixth form are provided with more personalised opportunities to gain experience of the world of work and to link their learning to real life.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The vast majority who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. They report that the school is well led and managed and that their children are happy, feel safe and make good progress in their learning.

The governing body challenges and supports your team well. You work closely with the governors, who are kept well informed and take an eager interest in pupils' progress and school developments. Governors share the staff's enthusiasm about the new curriculum pathways that leaders have implemented. They understand the need to embed these and to ensure that the new assessment systems are robust.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a strong and effective safeguarding environment where pupils' safety and well-being are prominent. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The designated safeguarding officers are well-informed, both in relation to safeguarding practice and about the pupils in the school. The systems to safeguard pupils are precise and are monitored meticulously by leaders, who take swift action when safeguarding concerns are raised. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to support the pupils in their care. Staff have up-to-date knowledge of the latest statutory requirements and are vigilant about potential risks.

Despite pupils' learning or communication difficulties, the school strives to educate pupils on how to stay safe both within and outside school. Safeguarding is woven into the curriculum, covering topics such as road safety, transport training, 'stranger danger', 'private personal body areas', online safety, sexting and relationships. The vulnerability of your pupils and the necessity to maintain their personal dignity is well recognised by all staff. Leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe on arrival at school. Staff manage pupils' transition on and off transport effectively. Pupils are supervised carefully at all times while on site. Pupils say that they feel safe and know that they can share any anxieties with an adult. This is a result of the trusting relationships between staff and pupils. There are clear protocols for managing

absences and pupils missing from school. Parents agree that their children are safe in school and are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection, the school has become part of the Active Learning Trust. This has brought benefits to the school through collaborative working and the sharing of good practice. This has focused on leadership and management, and provided professional development opportunities for staff. It is also evident that you and the head of school bring skills and expertise to advance further the work of the trust.
- Leaders have made sure that the curriculum at every key stage is now more suited to the learning needs of the pupils. You have redesigned the curriculum to provide bespoke pathways from an early age, aimed at preparing pupils for their forthcoming independent or supported lives. Your approach to personalising the curriculum to meet pupils' needs has been received positively by pupils and parents, although this is not yet firmly established across all key stages. Governors and staff recognise that, with the varied needs of the pupils, the curriculum content requires further consolidation.
- Staff understand pupils very well and learning activities suit each pupil's interests. You have not been afraid to review and adapt your assessment procedures. However, the development of assessment for the new pathways is at a relatively early stage and needs refining. Approaches to teaching are carefully thought through so that teaching is accessible to all pupils, but further bespoke training needs to take place to raise the quality of teaching and learning to outstanding.
- Leaders plan thoroughly so that pupils can meet their education, health and care plan targets, which are shared with pupils and parents on a frequent basis. You work collaboratively with parents and other professionals in developing adaptable programmes of learning. Teachers liaise closely with teaching assistants, who are proficient and valued members of the school community. Aspirations for all pupils are high. Staff encourage pupils with their learning and provide well-targeted support. Leaders ensure that all pupils achieve well, regardless of their starting points or whether they are disadvantaged.
- You have been relentless in your drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This aspect of the school's work is led by a member of staff who has been pro-active in seeking advice from other schools and has had specialist training in working with pupils with higher complex needs. Further training is provided to staff and teaching assistants to ensure that pupils receive the personalised support they require in order to meet their targets.
- You encourage those who are ready to move on at the end of Year 11 to transfer to college. Students in the sixth form make good progress overall because teachers match activities closely to their learning needs and provide the right amount of challenge. They receive supportive careers information and guidance on their future options which prepare them well for the next stage of their lives.
- There were high levels of persistent absence in 2017. Staff responsible for

monitoring attendance know pupils well. They can explain the reasons for pupils' frequent absence and what has been done to support them. You have clear systems in place to record pupils' attendance. All absences are followed up swiftly and accounted for. Some pupils regularly attend medical appointments, and this affects their rates of attendance. Other medical issues result in prolonged stays in hospital and have a substantial impact on pupils' attendance. Regular interaction between home and school ensures that leaders have up-to-date knowledge regarding illnesses and the complex medical concerns of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further strengthen the curriculum content and embed the new curriculum pathways model
- further refine assessment systems linked to the new pathways so that all pupils make consistently strong progress
- review strategies to ensure that teachers get the training they require to build upon their already strong practice.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Active Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the head of school and middle leaders. We conducted learning walks with you and the head of school, visiting all key stages. We looked at the single central record of your recruitment checks of staff. We discussed safeguarding, attendance, the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment. We looked at a range of documentation, which included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan, an external evaluation of the school, policies and other information on the school website. We spoke to pupils and informally to teaching and support staff. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of the Active Learning Trust and the standards director.