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Miss Danielle Barker
Headteacher
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The Fairway
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Dear Miss Barker

Short inspection of Northway School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 2018 with Joy Barter, 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 outstanding in May 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As a new headteacher, you have a clear vision of the experience you want pupils to encounter. Pupils develop a love of learning through a broad and exciting curriculum, which allows them to excel both academically and personally. Your vision is shared by governors, staff, parents and carers, who work together effectively to achieve it. You know the school exceptionally well and, since your appointment, have worked hard to effect improvements in many aspects.

The school has significant strengths and has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils' learning experiences are purposeful and engaging. Many pupils, and especially those with some of the most significant special educational needs, make very strong progress over time. This is mainly because teachers and leaders design appropriate, bespoke learning programmes for individual pupils. Classrooms are warm, inviting places where pupils are very eager to participate in the full range of activities on offer. Staff are nurturing; they gently encourage and persuade pupils to do things for themselves. They skilfully build pupils' independence and self-confidence, enabling them to enjoy their learning.

The governors are committed, skilled and knowledgeable. They pay regular visits to the school to check on how well the priorities for improvement are being addressed. They provide the right balance of support and challenge to you and your staff, for example through the skilful use of the information they receive about pupils'

academic progress and personal development. The governors ensure that you make excellent use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and develop physical education (PE) and sport in the school. The provision to support pupils' personal development and well-being is of high quality.

You are currently revising the school's development plan to ensure that the most important priorities for improvement are identified and addressed. For example, you have noted that the school's intake is changing rapidly, and the school needs to address this by reviewing its curriculum. This critical task has not yet been undertaken.

The school is very popular with the local community and has expanded rapidly since the previous inspection. You skilfully draw on the expertise of other leaders, both from within school and from the 'Moon Partnership', comprising the four special schools in Barnet. This adds greater capacity to leadership and makes a valuable contribution to sustaining pupils' outstanding outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, with a tangible atmosphere of care and respect throughout. This is due primarily to the excellent leadership of safeguarding which is highly valued by staff and parents.

You have ensured that all safeguarding policies and procedures are effective. Records of staff recruitment are detailed and of a high quality. All members of staff receive regular training in safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty awareness. Staff with whom inspectors spoke were well aware of the procedures for recording concerns. Several members of the leadership team and governors are trained in safer recruitment. You have close working relationships with a number of outside agencies, including children's social care. Pupils are taught about e-safety through the curriculum. Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey felt that their children were safe at this school and were well cared for. Governors have a strong awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Staff are aware of the greater safeguarding risks associated with pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and mitigate these risks through pupils' curriculum experiences. For example, those pupils who have very limited verbal communication are supported to share any worries through signing.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on three lines of enquiry. The first of these was in relation to current pupils' progress across the curriculum. The school judges pupils' progress as outstanding in its self-evaluation. This is in the context of pupils who, in the main, have many complex needs and whose attainment is consistently below average.
- Leaders keep a very close check on the progress of every pupil; this ensures that no pupil slips through the net with their needs unmet. The personalised learning

plans (PLPs) that you have introduced for all pupils are having a strong impact on pupils' progress across the curriculum. This is because the literacy, mathematics and personal development targets are based on an accurate assessment of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Staff are confident in assessing pupils' progress against clear learning objectives and success criteria. This information is monitored very closely by staff and leaders alike and used to identify the next small steps in pupils' learning. Consequently, teaching is highly focused as it is based on a sharp insight into pupils' current learning. Over time, the small steps become strides, resulting in most pupils making exceptional progress across the curriculum. Inspectors found a strong correlation between evidence of learning seen in pupils' work and the progress information presented by the school.

- My next line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the curriculum in promoting pupils' personal development and well-being. This is because leaders say that the school has invested a lot of time, effort and financial resource into developing pupils' independence, confidence and self-help skills. Indeed, this aim is critical to the school's vision and mission.
- Leaders make the development of pupils' independence and communication skills central to their mission. They are very successful in their endeavours. Staff work continually to improve pupils' communication skills, ensuring that they have the right tools to communicate effectively. As a result of whole-staff training, there is a consistent approach to communication across the curriculum. Even those pupils with very limited verbal communication skills are expected to try their best, using visual aids or signing, to express themselves clearly. For example, during a cooking session, pupils made pizza using fresh ingredients on pitta bread, and used picture cues to demonstrate their understanding of the instructions.
- The curriculum is very successful at instilling confidence and enhancing pupils' self-esteem. Specialist staff for swimming, dance, sign language and physical education are very skilful at teaching pupils the key skills in their areas of learning. Pupils partake in a wide range of learning activities that have a very positive impact on the development of their self-image. Staff are very competent in seizing the special moments as they arise in lessons and turning them into useful learning opportunities.
- The final area that I focused on during this inspection related to the impact of leaders on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The school's own self-evaluation has judged this critical aspect of the school's work to be outstanding.
- Teachers work closely in partnership with other support staff to provide the necessary personal support to help most pupils achieve exceptionally well. Leaders ensure that the school's agreed approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are shared explicitly with staff through training and development opportunities. This has brought about a consistency of approach across the school, and a common understanding about effective practice. In the classroom, well-established routines, and staff who frequently celebrate positive behaviour, help to keep almost all pupils focused on the task in hand. This enables pupils to feel safe and secure, and willing to try out new experiences.

- Last year, leaders introduced an important classroom initiative that focuses on strategies to gain and sustain pupils' attention. All staff are now consistently competent at implementing this very effectively. As a result, pupils are hooked into their learning very quickly at the start of a session; pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. The joy on pupils' faces was seen, for instance, when they extracted plastic spiders out of an amorphous mass of jelly on a large tray. The awe and wonder generated sustained their attention for a long period of time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a strategic review of the curriculum is carried out to make sure that it is fit for purpose in the context of the rapidly changing intake of the 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 Barnet. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nasim Butt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited many classes jointly with senior leaders. They also scrutinised samples of pupils' work across the curriculum. Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation document and records of safeguarding. Inspectors looked at the school's records for staff recruitment and training. Throughout the inspection, inspectors held discussions with you, your leadership team and members of staff. Inspectors met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. They also met with a representative group of eight pupils. Inspectors held a telephone call with a member of the local authority and your previous school improvement partner. Inspectors took into consideration 44 staff survey responses and the seven responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Inspectors spoke to a group of parents and observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day. Inspectors also reviewed the school's website.