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Kevin Latham
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Dear Mr Latham

Short inspection of Isebrook SEN Cognition & Learning College

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with John Edwards, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you were appointed as headteacher, you have acted quickly to improve the school and give it clear direction. You have changed the curriculum so that it focuses on achieving the best outcomes for each pupil. More attention is now given to tackling barriers to learning, such as pupils' sensory and mental health needs. By identifying the importance of this work, you have created a calm but purposeful learning culture in the school. This allows pupils to thrive and make good progress.

You have refocused the school's priorities firmly around its pupils. Your staff also feel supported. You have achieved both these things by providing staff training that is driven by the needs of the pupils. For example, staff have attended a semantics course to help improve girls' communication skills. In a similar way, staff recognise that their performance management is taken seriously and is linked to priorities in the school improvement plan. As a result, there is a strong sense of purpose around the school and staff see themselves as a unified team and the school as a happy place to work.

The behaviour of pupils is a key strength. They arrive at school each morning behaving calmly and appropriately and are well supported by staff. Pupils are offered a range of opportunities to interact and socialise informally, for example in the breakfast club. This is of great value given the numbers of pupils in the school who have been diagnosed with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The pupil numbers in your school have grown since the last inspection and are expected to continue to grow. A new school building is currently being built and you have recently formed a multi-academy trust with another local special school. However, this has not distracted you from your school's core purpose, which is to improve the life chances of your pupils.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You now ensure that learning is pitched at the right level. Teachers target questions carefully to meet individual pupils' needs, ensuring the pupils are challenged by each task. They give pupils the time they need to process questions and instructions. Teachers provide pupils with communication aids, such as pictures and symbols, so that they can use them to answer questions and communicate their needs. Also, you ensure that in all lessons pupils are supported by teaching assistants who know them well and can adjust tasks so that pupils continue to make good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

School staff and governors take safeguarding very seriously. They understand the vulnerabilities of each pupil. Therefore, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Procedures for keeping pupils safe are robust, consistently applied and fit for purpose.

The school's safeguarding policy is comprehensive and up to date. The roles of staff responsible for safeguarding are clearly outlined. The names and photographs of the designated safeguarding leads are displayed around school and information about safeguarding is easily accessible for staff and parents. There is an effective system in place for recording concerns.

All staff receive regular training in how to keep children safe. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding policies and procedures, which they follow stringently. In addition, senior leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment procedures.

Parents and carers say that their children are safe and happy in school. Pupils also feel safe and are taught about how to keep themselves safe on the internet. In addition, they know who to go to if they have a worry or concern. Younger pupils can go to a student mentor, if they wish, who will help to respond to their concerns.

Safeguarding referrals are pursued by the school if they are not promptly acted on by external agencies.

Inspection findings

During the inspection, inspectors focused on what leaders are doing to ensure that pupils are making good progress, whether pupils' behaviour is good and the effectiveness of leadership and management.

- New procedures are in place for measuring how much progress pupils make. Leaders and teachers compare the progress of pupils in this school with those from other similar schools or starting points. Based on this, each pupil's progress is reviewed every term. If pupils are found to be underachieving, support plans are developed to get them back on track. As a result, the number of pupils making less than expected progress in mathematics is much lower this year compared to last year.
- The school now monitors the progress pupils make in non-academic areas such as personal, social and life skills. The objectives for these areas are often in pupils' education, health and care plans or statements of special educational needs. For some pupils, the progress they make in these areas leads them to make rapid gains in core subjects like English and mathematics.
- Pupils behave well in the school and their behaviour is managed positively. When incidents occur, pupils are brought together, by staff, to resolve conflicts between themselves, using restorative approaches. 'Reflection time' is used, instead of detentions, and staff support pupils in regulating their own emotions through using 'zones of regulation' and the use of 'protective behaviours'. These approaches have led to fewer incidents occurring in school. Records show that the numbers of bullying and racist incidents have also reduced.
- School leaders place extra emphasis on pastoral support being offered to pupils, by using educational and clinical/counselling psychologists, as well as the school's own occupational therapist. The purpose of this is to support those pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs, by creating a culture of good mental health within the school.
- The school's proactive approach to the personal well-being of its pupils has led to a sharp reduction in the numbers of fixed-term exclusions being made.
- School leaders show strong capacity to improve the school, by changing the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils. Pupils are offered 'learning pathways' that are challenging and relevant. For example, some post-16 students can follow pathways that lead to apprenticeships, or supported internships, while for others a supported living arrangement is a relevant goal. The school's own shop, 'The Studio', provides excellent opportunities for work-related learning for students. Pupils' personal and social skills are extended through a broad range of carefully planned provision. For example, pupil premium funding is used for fishing trips and boxing, as well as the employment of learning mentors. Year 7 catch-up funding helps pupils to build their personal relationships using Forest Schools. It also provides additional phonics support and a scheme to extend pupils' knowledge of high-frequency words.
- Governance is strong in holding school leaders to account for school improvement. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses because they receive regular reports from school leaders on key areas of the school's work, such as pupils' progress. They also help the headteacher and school leaders to maintain their focus on improving the school. Governors supported the trustees of the multi-academy trust in their decision to appoint a chief operations officer. The intention is to give more capacity to the headteacher, as the multi-

academy trust's chief executive officer, to focus his attention on pupil learning within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve
- the school's plans for improvement are sharper in identifying the timescales and who is responsible for ensuring that actions are carried out effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Julian Scholefield
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher for curriculum, the assistant headteacher for post-16, the chair of governors, one of the trustees of the multi-academy trust, the headteacher of the other school in the multi-academy trust and a selection of school staff. We observed pupils on arrival, met some parents, visited most of the classes, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' current work. We considered the 16 responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding records and assessment information about pupils' progress. We studied the school improvement plan and self-evaluation summary. We also looked at information published on the school's website.