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Aine Ni Ruairc
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Ruairc

Short inspection of Watergate School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Kanwaljit Singh, 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This inspection confirms that you have sustained high levels of provision since 2009. You have made sure that the one area for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection has been addressed fully. Teachers now make sure that learning starts promptly in all lessons. You have also spearheaded other significant improvements in leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

You have restructured the leadership team and bolstered capacity with new middle leaders and a deputy headteacher. All leaders share your high expectations and a determination to make sure that pupils achieve their very best. Roles and responsibilities have been successfully reviewed and reorganised. This has enabled you to strengthen still further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as therapeutic support, securing personalised provision for pupils. The bedrock of your work is developing pupils' communication skills. Innovative approaches in information and communication technology (ICT) further enhance the use of other strategies, including the use of symbols, signs and verbal communication. You deploy staff expertise well to promote and extend pupils' physical skills and their personal development. As a result, specialist support is targeted sharply for those pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, as well as the high number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils reflect a clear and uncompromising commitment to keeping pupils safe and secure. There is a culture of collective responsibility across the school by staff and governors to uphold the rights and welfare of all pupils. You and your team know each pupil exceptionally well. As you explained, many pupils are non-verbal. Staff are highly attuned to any differences in pupils' behaviour and demeanour. As any changes may indicate a potential cause for concern, staff record and report their observations diligently to you as designated safeguarding lead. Consequently, you are able to ensure that pupils' needs and welfare are supported well, through your own multi-agency team, as well as excellent liaison with a range of relevant external agencies. You secure the right level of expertise and support for families as and when required. Training is up to date and both governors and staff are fully aware of all their statutory safeguarding responsibilities. Pupils told inspectors that they love school and that they feel very safe. They are helped to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. School councillors display a keen safety awareness, and are quick to point out the need to acquire more safety helmets when they use their bicycles.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on whether individual pupil's targets are challenging enough to secure outstanding progress for all groups of learners.
- You explained that pupils are assessed rigorously when they join the school. This information is combined with evidence from previous schools, and from observations made by the multi-disciplinary team who work very closely with the families prior to the pupils' admission. As a result, staff have an incisive understanding of pupils' complex and diverse needs. They are able to set targets that are highly personalised which secure at least good, and usually rapid, progress. This is particularly so for pupils' communication, physical, literacy and mathematical skills and personal development.
- You have made sure that setting targets for pupils' progress is an integral part of teaching and learning. Teams, including the speech and language therapists, set realistic, appropriate and challenging targets. These are reviewed regularly and monitored effectively by the senior leadership team to check that pupils' progress proceeds at a fast pace.
- You group pupils by ability for communication and literacy skills. Leaders rigorously monitor the impact of this work on pupils' progress and learning. They use this evidence to share best practice across the school. You wisely intend to use some of these successful strategies in mathematics.
- Inspection observations confirm that, most of the time, pupils are fully engaged in their learning because activities are relevant and pitched at the right level of challenge. However, on a few occasions, adults do not ensure that all pupils show good concentration when working in groups.
- My second line of enquiry explored the accuracy of assessment. You have revised the curriculum to secure greater progression and continuity in all subjects. There

is now a better balance between pupils' learning in different subjects, as well as promoting their self-help skills. Middle leaders give welcome and effective advice and training for their colleagues in specific subjects.

- Adaptation of activities means that all pupils access the same curriculum and learn effectively, participating at an appropriate level for them. Physical and mental well-being are integral to many activities. The daily collective session of active movement on the playground, where pupils join in to the beat of invigorating music, is just one example of this.
- Checks of pupils' progress are linked closely to the curriculum. You have made sure that they are accurate through regular checking with other schools within the local partnership. This includes work with the local secondary special school where most Year 6 pupils transfer to when they leave this school. Inspectors checked assessments alongside pupils' work, confirming that teachers' judgement is accurate. This also confirmed that pupils are making rapid progress.
- You have introduced an ongoing assessment cycle, where small steps in pupils' learning are recorded to build a picture of their distinct learning journeys. These observations inform the termly milestones very well. Staff have embraced this approach, taking every opportunity to record pupils' achievement through note-taking and photographs. Class displays also provide a clear progression of skills developed over time. Pupils' efforts are celebrated, raising their confidence, self-esteem and sense of worth.
- Assessments are used effectively to make sure no pupil underachieves. Any pupils at risk of doing so are identified quickly, and appropriate and intensive support is put in place to boost their progress.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how well pupils are encouraged to be independent learners. Adults demonstrate high expectations for behaviour and learning, using encouragement and praise, as well as other rewards, to modify and instil appropriate behaviour. This motivates pupils to keep trying hard.
- Those pupils with challenging behaviours are managed well. Staff make sure that possible triggers are avoided, and de-escalate potential outbursts quickly. When appropriate, some pupils are provided with time out on their own to calm down and reflect on their behaviour.
- Staff know when to stand back and allow pupils to have a go for themselves, giving them constant praise and boosting their confidence. Staff select stimulating resources to support pupils to be independent in their learning. They constantly talk to pupils, using visual cues and signing to reinforce communication and meaning. ICT resources are used remarkably well. Those pupils with significant physical disabilities choose activities by activating a computer screen with their eyes.
- Pupils willingly take on responsibilities for various tasks around the school, increasing their sense of independence considerably. As their confidence increases, they take trips out to the local shops, grow their own produce in a local allotment, enjoy contact with members of the local community and make visits further afield on the train.
- School councillors are elected democratically, providing a strong voice for their

friends and contributing to the work of the school. Inspectors observed some highly motivated council members participating in discussions. Pupils are very keen to share their ideas and opinions.

- Finally, in the course of my inspection, I considered teachers' use of resources. Although classrooms support pupils' communication and literacy skills very well through a host of visual symbols and words, mathematics still displays a lack of visual and hands-on equipment to help pupils understand basic mathematical concepts.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils are better supported by adults to concentrate more on their learning in group situations
- pupils' mathematical understanding is improved through the use of visual symbols and equipment.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, other leaders and governors, including the chair and vice-chair of governors. They talked to a group of staff and held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors visited most classes to observe teaching and learning, and spoke to pupils informally and looked at their work. An inspector observed a group of pupils reading and visited a school council meeting. The inspection team considered eight responses to the online staff survey and 27 parental contributions to the online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector met with several parents informally before school. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, recruitment checks on staff working in the school and other records relating to safeguarding. Information about pupils' progress was also evaluated.