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Mr Mike Lock
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Dear Mr Lock

Short inspection of Combe Pafford School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 2018 with Paula Marsh, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have high aspirations for all pupils to be successful and work tirelessly to ensure that they receive the very best teaching and learning opportunities. Your motto 'believe, succeed, achieve' shines through all of the school's work. You are ably supported by your senior leaders and staff, who share your vision and determination for the school to become outstanding.

Relationships within the school are impressive. Although this is a large special school, leaders and staff know their pupils extremely well. This means they can plan provision which meet pupils' needs well. As a result, pupils' outcomes remain good across the school.

The sixth form was judged to be outstanding at the previous inspection. This provision continues to be a significant strength and a highly effective aspect of the school's work. The head of the sixth form and his team are passionate about the quality of education that students receive. There is continuous monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum and wider opportunities to ensure students receive the very best. Relationships with a wide range of employers are striking. This enables students to receive valuable work experiences in their chosen line of work. As a result, students are highly successful in gaining paid employment in areas such as

construction, horticulture, hospitality and retail. During the inspection, students demonstrated their impressive skills in bricklaying and plastering, clearly benefiting from skilled teaching and mentoring.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve teaching and learning by carefully monitoring the school's approach to teaching handwriting, and to improve the communication skills for pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder. This work is effective. Handwriting is well taught and staff have high expectations of pupils' presentation. As a result, pupils' work viewed by inspectors showed good progress in handwriting skills and presentation was of high quality. The teaching of communication skills is carefully threaded throughout the curriculum for all pupils. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to share and discuss their learning with others. Wider opportunities include presentations and speaking in assemblies. As a result, pupils show high levels of confidence in talking. This was exemplified during the inspection. Pupils spoke to inspectors with confidence about their work, their school experiences and aspirations for their futures.

Leaders, including governors, were also asked to improve their checks on how well plans for improvement are working. This work is partially effective. There are clear systems in place to check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders undertake regular checks on pupils' learning, which include lesson observations and book scrutinies. However, you have identified that further work needs to be undertaken to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. New leaders have not yet had the opportunity to routinely monitor the quality of mathematics teaching in the school and to check if planned actions are enabling pupils to make the best possible progress in mathematics. Plans are in place to quickly tackle this, and there is good capacity to achieve this aim.

A relatively small proportion of parents contributed to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Most parents who did respond reported that their child is happy, safe, is taught well and makes good progress. 'Amazing school' and 'excellent teaching staff, excellent facilities, excellent pastoral care and well run and governed' were just some of the positive comments made by parents.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school makes sure pupils are safe; the impact of leaders, including governors, to ensure that pupils receive an effective standard of education; how leaders have driven forward improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection; and the effectiveness of the curriculum in ensuring that pupils are well prepared for their future in education, training or employment. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings.'

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. The nature of your school means that all pupils are vulnerable. Leaders ensure that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility irrespective of their role. Therefore, there is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from all possible risks.

Recent training for all staff is up to date and follows the most recent national legislation. High-quality induction of staff enables them to apply the school's policies and procedures with confidence. This means that staff are able to quickly spot any concerns and take rapid action. As a result, pupils at your school are kept safe.

Leaders' records are detailed and of high quality. Records show that designated safeguarding leaders work closely with external agencies to minimise pupils' risk of harm. They do not hesitate to escalate concerns, should the need arise, in order to keep pupils safe.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. This is because you provide them with the relevant information and strategies they need to keep themselves safe. They have a good understanding of the risks they face to their safety, both inside and outside of school. For example, they are able to articulate with confidence how to keep themselves safe when out in the community. Pupils told inspectors that they are well looked after by staff and are confident that any worries or concerns they have are quickly sorted.

All parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, agree that their child feels safe at the school.

During the inspection, behaviour of pupils within lessons and at other times was impressive. Pupils told inspectors that the behaviour seen was 'usual' and that they were 'taught to work together in partnership'. This is reflected in the low number of behavioural incidents that take place. Fixed-term exclusions are rare and used only as a last resort.

Attendance is carefully monitored at the school and overall attendance remains above the national average for special schools. However, you have correctly identified that further work needs to be undertaken to reduce the persistent absence of a few of your pupils.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders demonstrate a passion and determination to provide pupils at Combe Pafford with a high-quality education. You have high expectations of your staff and yourselves as leaders to ensure that pupils have the very best

learning experiences. Leaders' and governors' vision for the school to be outstanding is clear. Your motivation and commitment to achieve this and drive forward identified improvements are demonstrable. You are outward looking and make effective use of external educational consultants to support and challenge you in your journey to 'outstanding'.

- Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation is accurate and school development plans reflect the improvements required. Most notably, you have correctly recognised that the progress pupils make in mathematics is not as good as in other subjects. Through careful analysis, you identified the dip in mathematics outcomes for pupils in 2018 and have implemented effective plans to rectify this weakness.
- You and your leaders track the learning and progress of each pupil thoroughly. You undertake a wide range of monitoring activities to check the quality of teaching and learning. These activities include lesson observations, work scrutinies and pupil conferencing. You provide opportunities for staff to develop and improve their practice through carefully considered professional development. Where teaching does not meet your exacting standards, you put in support and guidance to tackle weaknesses. Consequently, teaching is strong and outcomes for pupils are good.
- Staff take careful account of pupils' education and health care plans when setting their individual targets. This means that learning activities meet the needs of pupils well and enable them to make good progress both academically and socially.
- The curriculum is rich and interesting. Pupils find it engaging and it engenders a love of learning. Your integrated three-circled approach of academic, personal and social development and work-related learning shines through the work of the school. This approach successfully supports pupils to become independent, lifelong learners. Furthermore, it provides them with the opportunity to lead purposeful and successful lives. Pupils have high aspirations for their own futures and want to do well. This is exemplified in the impressive numbers of pupils and students gaining paid employment in their chosen careers, which is well above the national average of people with learning difficulties.
- Leaders provide pupils with a wealth of high-quality and varied opportunities beyond the classroom which, otherwise, they may never experience. For example, education visits play a crucial role. Indeed, at the time of the inspection, Year 11 pupils were in China. Other international links include Belgium, Nigeria and Costa Rica. Such visits provide pupils with the opportunity to encounter different cultures and experiences beyond Britain, in addition to building their independence and self-confidence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of mathematics further improves to enable pupils to make the best possible progress
- the attendance of pupils remains a priority in order to reduce persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

In your absence, inspectors met with your leaders. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection. We observed the start of the day, when pupils first arrive in school. We carried out 'learning walks' through classes, accompanied by your senior leaders. We also held discussions with governors, phase and subject leaders, staff and pupils. We had a telephone conversation with you. This phone call was because, at the time of the inspection, you were on a residential trip to China with a group of Year 11 pupils.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. Inspectors also looked at records relating to behaviour and safety, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspectors took into account the 17 responses to the online survey, 'Parent View'. They considered additional comments received from parents via the free-text message service.