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Mrs Judith Chamberlain
Headteacher
Lakeside School
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Dear Mrs Chamberlain

Short inspection of Lakeside School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018 with Tania Perry, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Your leadership is inspirational. Your deep commitment to the school and exceptional leadership are reflected in the quality of support you provide for the pupils and their families. You, your staff and governors constantly strive to improve outcomes for all pupils, both in their academic studies and in their personal development. By further developing the role of middle leaders, you have established greater profundity and consistency across the school.

Your self-evaluation is accurate and clearly defines the school's many strengths. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that the provision for pupils is outstanding. You and your staff are always looking to improve the school further and consider carefully factors which may affect its future work.

Your highly motivated staff enjoy working at the school and know that leaders respect the excellent work that they do. They are well trained and feel exceptionally well supported. Your staff work with passion and enthusiasm to provide every pupil with a personalised curriculum that unlocks their potential and enables them to thrive. Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely positive. Staff show genuine concern and care to all pupils. Pupils are at the heart of what staff do each day and are always put first.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is exemplary. They are respectful to each other and to staff. Pupils are happy, respond well to staff instructions and show high levels of engagement with their learning. The school excels in developing pupils' communication skills. Signs, symbols, gestures and the use of real objects are a recurring part of everyday lessons throughout the school.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They say how delighted they are that their children attend this school. They feel that the school supports the whole family, not just their child. All parents that shared views with the inspectors were complimentary about the quality of the education and care that their children receive. One parent expressed the views of many, commenting that, 'Lakeside is incredible, every person there is kind and genuinely caring.'

Governors are committed to supporting the school. Members have high aspirations. They ask searching and pertinent questions of leaders to check that the school's provision continues to be outstanding. They recognise the impact of your inspirational leadership in empowering and supporting staff at all levels to develop their practice. Governors have a range of skills that complement those of the school leadership team. They are keen to identify where improvements need to be made.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. The senior leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Confidential records and files relating to individual pupils are meticulous. All staff have up-to-date training. Staff are alert for signs that a pupil may be at risk. Parents and carers say that their children are kept safe in school. Pupils say that they know whom to talk to if they have any concerns. Pupils and their families are well supported by leaders.

The health and safety of the school site are regularly reviewed. An external audit in January 2018 by the local authority graded it as outstanding. Risk assessments show that staff pay careful attention to potential risks when planning activities such as outings to the bowling alley. Strong links with outside agencies add to the effectiveness of the school.

Pupil voice is at the centre of decision-making. Every effort is made to include the views and feelings of the pupils. This is especially effective for those pupils who find traditional methods of communication difficult.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I explored the school's new approach to assessment and how information is used rigorously to ensure that pupils make as much progress as possible. You have ensured that the recently developed assessment system is embedded into daily teaching and learning. Leaders and teachers now have frequent information that describes in detail what pupils can do. As a result, pupils' progress over time is impressive. The consistency of approach means that

pupils' progress is sustained over time and, for many, is rapid.

- Staff set challenging targets which are frequently reviewed and linked carefully to the expected outcomes found in pupils' education, health and care plans. Teachers carefully assess what each pupil understands and can do. They use this information precisely to inform their planning for each pupil, expertly building on pupils' learning to make sure that pupils make excellent progress. There is a sharp focus on supporting any pupil not meeting these targets. However, leaders agree that there is scope to improve reading even further. You recognise that further staff training and the implementation of new approaches will help to extend pupils' self-esteem in reading.
- I also examined how well the school prepares the pupils for the next stage in their life. Staff are passionate about preparing pupils for their next steps. Pupils are supported to develop life skills through mini-enterprise topics and real-life experiences. They relish opportunities such as work experience and achieve externally accredited qualifications. All leavers have made this transition successfully over a period of years, progressing to suitable personalised courses at college or supported living in the community. As a result, the pupils become confident young adults and are well equipped for their futures.
- Convincing evidence was provided about pupils' attendance. Leaders' actions are exclusive to the circumstances and challenges of each pupil. It is clear that staff do all they can to make sure that pupils attend regularly. However, for some pupils, due to severe medical reasons, attendance is not consistent. Leaders ensure that any pupils who are absent are given all the support and time they need to catch up on the learning they have missed. Adults genuinely listen to pupils and respect what they have to say. Consequently, pupils want to come to school and enjoy the lessons they have.
- My final focus was on the area for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You now make use of external moderation and evaluation of teaching to ensure that current high-quality teaching is sustained. You have a profound understanding of the aspects of teaching that are working well. You provide highly personalised training and support which are sharply focused on the development of each teacher's practice. The school's leaders work closely with leaders from nearby schools and from other counties to check that assessment information is accurate and consistent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further plan and fully apply new approaches to reading so that pupils' progress in reading is as outstanding as it is in other areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, a range of activities were carried out to gather information on the key lines of enquiry. Inspectors met with you, your deputy headteacher and your assistant headteacher. Inspectors talked with staff, governors and parents. I held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I met with the chair and three other members of the governing body. We visited all classes with leaders, where we observed learning. We saw pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. We also scrutinised pupils' work and progress files with school leaders. Both inspectors spoke with pupils during the day in lessons and more formally in a meeting with representatives from the school council. I took account of 45 staff survey responses and 28 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 14 free-text responses. A range of documentation was also scrutinised to find out about your monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, your improvement and action plans, and safeguarding procedures in school.