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Mr Philip Pike
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pike

Short inspection of The Phoenix School

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 2016 with Vanessa Love, 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 July 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You have maintained outstanding provision at the school for three consecutive inspections and this is an exemplary achievement. The school is excellent in all aspects of its provision. The needs of pupils who have a wide range of profound and multiple learning difficulties or physical disabilities continue to be met extremely well. You are passionate in pursuing the very best interests of the children and their families. Your innovative spirit, your accurate evaluation of the difference you make to pupils' achievement and your determination to provide excellent training for all staff regardless of their levels of responsibility are but a few of the many reasons for your success.

An extensive building project, completed this year, has created state-of-the-art, bright and spacious learning spaces for learners in the upper school. Leaders and governors have not allowed this extensive building project to distract them from continuing to ensure the best possible learning across the school. You personally worked hard to minimise any disruption to staff and pupils. The hydrotherapy pool, the classrooms and the outdoor spaces in the lower school are well maintained and offer excellent facilities for pupils and staff.

Pupils are actively involved in running the school because staff listen to them. When you asked whether you should sit in on their meeting with one inspector, pupils clearly said that it was not necessary, showing their high level of confidence to speak to visitors unsupervised. The school is a haven of peace and calm. It is a

warm and welcoming place, also, for parents and carers. Expectations are very high throughout the school. Pupils are challenged and supported to achieve as much as they possibly can. Older learners are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning when they leave the school at age 19, and partnerships with local colleges are well established.

Quite a number of parents work at the school and everyone joins in to ensure that pupils and learners are comfortable and ready to learn. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the hard-working staff and your excellent leadership. Many said that the school is 'like a big family', 'the headteacher is exceptional' and that 'support at times of trauma is brilliant'. The help for families who have recently moved to live in Peterborough, particularly those who speak English as an additional language, is second to none. Parents praise, in particular, the excellent range of activities provided before and after school. These make a real difference to the life of many working families.

The curriculum is rich and exciting. Subject leaders are experts in their fields and seek to adapt their planning and resources so that pupils make rapid progress towards their learning targets. Staff make sure that pupils experience the same things as their peers in mainstream schools, from exciting social events, such as 'The Proms', to fun activities in the local community and residential experiences in far-away places. Parents trust you and your staff unreservedly to care for their children. Learning activities take place in the local community whenever possible. Staff overcome potential hurdles and ensure that pupils are always safe. Your next endeavour is to open a café and charity shop in Herlington so that learners can develop their independent life skills further and gain a true experience of the world of work.

You have addressed the single identified area for improvement from the previous inspection very well. You were asked to bring the good teaching to the level of the best. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Assessment information is used very effectively and consistently across the school to ensure that pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. Teachers and teaching assistants capture the small steps of progress promptly, communicate children's achievements to parents quickly and build rapidly on what pupils have achieved. Methods to assess pupils and to develop their communication skills are exemplary. Pupils' physical progress and achievement across subjects are recorded clearly, and individual learning outcomes are constantly reviewed to provide the right challenges for pupils to work towards. Parents and pupils are actively involved in these discussions to inform the review of pupils' education, health and care plans.

With the support of the experienced deputy headteacher, the three dynamic assistant headteachers, highly knowledgeable subject leaders and governors, you evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses very accurately. You are not complacent, and draw on the advice of external professionals to check that the school is doing its best. You work very closely with other mainstream and special schools to share good practice and keep up to date with latest research.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements and procedures remain a high priority for everyone. The deputy headteacher and other responsible staff regularly check to ensure that the school's systems and practices remain effective. Training is up to date including in safer recruitment practices. The latest statutory guidance is reflected in the policies. All the required employment checks are carried out and arrangements for inducting new staff to the school are excellent. Diligent staff conduct detailed risk assessments for any off-site activities. All these assessments are signed off by yourself or the deputy headteacher.

Staff carry out high-quality personal and health care safely. The two sites are very secure. Upper-school learners are kept safe when walking back to the lower site at the end of the day. This daily 'walking bus' is excellent. It improves learners' health and well-being, and gives them the opportunity to meet their mainstream peers who are also returning home from school at the end of the day.

Child protection roles and responsibilities are known and understood by all staff, who alert senior leaders when they have any concerns. Staff know pupils and their families very well and work closely with other professionals to ensure that pupils get access to the services that they need. The way the senior team challenges some families' cultural norms and the support for those who experience traumatic events in their life are exemplary.

Inspection findings

- You monitor the quality of teaching and learning very effectively because you explain clearly to staff what they do well and what they need to do to make their work even better. You give high-quality feedback leading to excellent teamwork between teachers and support staff. Those new to the school, and learners on work experience, learn an enormous amount from observing the outstanding practice that exists across all key stages.
- Staff know their classes extremely well and match the activities closely to pupils' complex needs. Teachers and support staff pay close attention to what pupils say, and find many ways of communicating with them to understand their wishes, responses and opinions. Staff do not readily accept a wrong answer when they know that a pupil could do better. This means that pupils make excellent progress from their starting points because interventions are put in place quickly, and expectation of what each individual pupil can achieve is high. Many pupils use assistive technologies very effectively to express their views and make choices. Staff ensure that those who can are able to move around and learn independently.
- The most able pupils are given many opportunities to thrive. During this visit, they were observed leading some aspects of the joyful collective celebration at the end of the school day. Experiences in the community, such as gardening projects, sport, team games, clubs and special outings extend their social, health and personal skills. A group of pupils will perform 'The Tempest' for the first time this year as part of the Shakespeare Festival at the

Key Theatre in Peterborough. These events exemplify the many ways in which the school promotes equality of opportunity for each pupil in all its work.

- Behaviour and relationships are excellent. Staff manage incidents very effectively and sensitively. They are skilled at defusing potentially challenging emotional or physical outbursts. Consequently, there is no confrontation and no need for restraint. Systems for monitoring attendance and to follow up absences are managed effectively. Many pupils' attendance is very good. The deputy headteacher pursues relentlessly any cases of children identified as missing education. Several pupils are frequently absent due to their complex medical conditions. They receive tailored support if required, either through home or hospital visits or through additional work being sent home to their families.
- The extensive programme of training and the difference this training makes to staff's practice are exemplary. The recently acquired status of The Phoenix School as a teaching school is benefiting staff, as well as other professionals in the local area or further afield. Staff are nurtured at the school and, despite the emotional and physical demands of the work, staff want to stay at The Phoenix School to develop their career. The high level of personnel stability is beneficial to pupils and their families.
- Parents are thrilled about the school. Those who are new to the city of Peterborough, including many families recently arrived from abroad, say that the school is amazing. A genuine open-door policy means that parents visit the school frequently. The website is highly informative. Families' views and opinions are valued.
- Governance continues to be a strength of the school. Governors use their considerable expertise and detailed knowledge of the school to support and challenge leaders to make improvements. They have carefully considered the composition of the governing body and are working towards making it more representative of the families' various cultures and backgrounds.
- The local authority draws on your expertise as an exemplar of outstanding practice. You contribute to school-to-school support and belong to local, national and international networks. You give opportunities for staff to share effective practice with other schools. The links with centres of excellence in London and with the University of Northampton are further examples of how The Phoenix School continues to innovate and learn.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors continue their efforts to make the governing body more representative of the school's community.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, your senior leaders and six governors, including the chair of the governing body. We met a local authority representative, the coordinator of the training school and the senior social worker for the area. We spoke to pupils and observed them in class, during break, at lunchtime and while attending after-school clubs. Inspectors visited all year groups and checked your evaluation of teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' work and assessments, and talked to teachers about their pupils' learning. We analysed recent performance information about pupils' progress, and reviewed procedures about attendance and keeping pupils safe. We looked at case studies of families in receipt of welfare support. I considered the views of 42 parents who responded to the school's survey conducted this month, and took account of seven additional comments from parents. We also spoke to many parents during the school day.