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Mrs Rosemarie Hilditch
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Dear Mrs Hilditch

Short inspection of New River College Medical

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2016 with Denise James-Mason, 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 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Pupils join the school with a diverse range of medical needs and may have not attended education for significant periods. Consequently, the vast majority have very low self-esteem and attainment because of gaps in their learning. You and your staff, including those who engage in home tutor support, demonstrate a real sensitivity and consistency of approach when working with young people across the school. A culture of high expectations for pupils to learn exists in all areas of the school's work. Pupils rapidly improve their self-confidence and acquire attitudes that are far more positive than when they first arrive. As a result, all groups of pupils make excellent progress from their starting points.

The school is a friendly place, which maintains a respectful atmosphere even in a busy hospital environment. The Lodge and the hospital classroom are areas of calmness. They provide for a highly supportive and nurturing environment for pupils, particularly those who are teenagers and adolescents. Staff work closely with medical colleagues and families which helps to maintain the school's welcoming atmosphere. The well-resourced hospital classroom is located close to the centre of the ward with a newly designed area for adolescents. The area is colourful with informative displays, which stimulate pupils' interests and

conversation. A wide range of resources is available to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. The Lodge is situated off the main hospital site. It has two rooms and an external garden area used to support pupils' learning.

Since the last inspection, you have addressed the only identified area for improvement. Assessment information is now used very effectively across the school. Staff are exceptionally well informed about the needs and vulnerabilities of the pupils they teach. Your current system of assessment includes information on the starting points of each individual, supported by a range of measures that help you assess pupils' social, communication and emotional progress. You and your leaders ensure that staff have consistently high expectations for pupils' learning and regularly review information on the progress pupils make. During the inspection, your leadership team were highly accurate in your views regarding the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers are able to make quick assessments and adjust their practice to meet the often changing medical needs of those pupils they teach.

Senior leaders' evaluation of the school's work is astute and accurate. Leaders rightly recognise the need to raise the attendance of a minority of pupils who do not attend regularly. The school has employed a college welfare officer who works closely with pupils and their families to develop strategies to support the regular attendance of those more vulnerable pupils. As a result, your staff share an uncompromising ambition to raise attendance even further.

Your evaluation is supported by an ambitious plan for further improvement, which enables stringent challenge from the school's management board. You reflect well on what differences leaders' actions make and you draw on advice from colleagues within the federation. This helps you to plan and take action to review any practice that does not support pupils' rapid progress. For example, this year, you have introduced courses in cookery skills and GCSE science in order to broaden the range of subjects taught and to offer further challenge to the most able.

External partners and medical professionals recognise that leaders and the management board are committed to meeting the needs of all groups of pupils. The school is viewed as a valued resource for pupils who have special educational needs or disability in the local area. Staff welcome opportunities to visit other schools and share good practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has an organised approach to all aspects of safeguarding. The single central record of recruitment checks made on staff meets statutory requirements. Leaders and governors have developed clear policies and procedures relating to safeguarding. Risk assessments are undertaken for trips and when teaching pupils at home. The governor responsible for safeguarding visits the school regularly to review policies and procedures. Staff are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, including the need to identify risk. The school works well with wider professional agencies and families to keep pupils safe and to provide appropriate intervention, care, guidance and support. Furthermore, staff adhere to the

exceptionally high standards of health and safety when working on the hospital ward.

Staff safeguarding training includes appropriate topics, such as preventing radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and e-safety. Leaders regularly review training to meet the needs of staff. Consequently, pupils feel safe and say they know how to seek help. Parents who spoke with inspectors were highly complementary of the school's work to promote the personal development, behaviour and welfare of their children.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection you have improved the consistency in assessment used across the school. All staff, including members of the management committee, teachers, support staff and therapists use assessment effectively. Pupils' starting points are identified on arrival through a range of standardised checks and close analysis is undertaken of assessment information. Learning activities are well planned and closely matched to pupils' needs. Pupils are set learning targets in English and mathematics, supported by regular reports from external professionals. Therefore, teachers are able to challenge pupils to make rapid progress from their individual starting points.
- The attendance of all pupils is tightly monitored. Any pupil who fails to arrive on time is quickly followed up and, if necessary, the college welfare officer visits the pupil's home on the same day of absence. This high level of scrutiny ensures that the vast majority of pupils make rapid gains in attendance. Current school information shows that pupils' attendance improves over time. However, a minority of pupils do not attend regularly despite the high level of support the school provides. Leaders rightly recognise this as an area for further focus.
- Leaders' and teachers' expectations of pupils remain exceptional. Teachers and support staff are sensitive to the vulnerabilities of the pupils they teach. However, their flexibility ensures that the impact on pupils' academic progress from their emotional and medical needs is not a barrier to success. Consequently, from low attainment on arrival, pupils overcome their fear of failure and achieve qualifications consistent with other pupils nationally. For example, in 2015, all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved good GCSE results in English and mathematics.
- The progress of current pupils in school is equally rapid. Pupils' work shows that they make exceptional progress over time. Information provided by the school shows that pupils in Year 11 are on track to achieve GCSEs or nationally equivalent qualifications in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. All pupils at the end of Key stage 4 successfully progress to further education or training.
- The most able pupils are challenged by the work set. They study subjects including GCSE English, mathematics, science and computing. A broad range of enrichment activities supports the needs of those more vulnerable pupils, disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs

or disability. As a result, all groups of pupils make excellent progress.

- Pupils who join the hospital classroom are promptly assessed on arrival from the ward so they settle quickly to learning. During the inspection, these pupils showed very positive relationships with adults and their progress was carefully recorded. Teachers communicate effectively with parents and their home school about the work of pupils.
- Teaching and support staff work seamlessly with medical professionals, providing treatment so that any disruption to the flow of pupils' learning is minimal. Such established routines ensure that pupils gain confidence quickly and engage well in the activities they are taught.
- Pupils demonstrate pride in their work. They were keen to show their work to inspectors and talk about their learning. For example, pupils in the hospital classroom were keen to share their knowledge about the structure of the eye and how senses are used to identify different liquids.
- In the Lodge, pupils were confident when talking about mathematical terms and sequences and how they used problem-solving to explore their answers. Pupils' presentation and writing skills show strong improvement over time. Persuasive and emotive writing about 'Animal farm' and 'Macbeth' demonstrated pupils' deeper understanding of English. Furthermore, pupils assess their own work regularly, so that they clearly understand how to improve it over time.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school and that bullying is rare. Records show that there have been no exclusions during this or the previous academic year. Inspectors confirmed that behaviour during the inspection was exceptional. Pupils could identify a staff member to seek help when required. They were aware of fundamental British values from recent news events and spoke about risks in society around radicalisation and homophobia.
- The school promotes strongly pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Effective professional partnerships enable those more vulnerable pupils to access a wide range of therapies which promote pupils' health and sensory development. Pupils regularly undertake enrichment activities that include photography, life skills, gardening and sport. Pupils who had recently visited a Dogs Trust centre described how they completed project work about the charity. This work was displayed clearly in the Lodge classroom.
- Parents who completed the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and those who spoke with inspectors were overwhelmingly positive about the school. Parents described how their children had, 'come on leaps and bounds' and reported how home tutoring meets their children's needs. Staff spoken to during the inspection shared a similar view. Inspectors confirmed this through pupils' work seen during the inspection.
- Leaders and staff make effective use of external support to ensure that the high quality of provision is maintained. Close liaison work with the Child Adolescent and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the local authority ensure staff are well trained to teach pupils with diverse mental health needs. For example, staff attend professional network meetings and work

with colleagues in schools across the local area.

- The management board and its governors are highly experienced and knowledgeable about the work of the school. They work closely with all leaders and share a clear drive to maintain the school's exceptional standards; for example, by challenging leaders to raise attendance even further in response to meeting the diverse needs of pupils in the school. The chair of the board is uncompromising in her desire to ensure consistency across the federation. Three committees focus on specific areas of responsibility so that governors fully perform their statutory duties. Consequently, the management board stringently holds leaders to account to ensure the highest outcomes for pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they successfully fulfil their ambition to raise regular attendance even further, so overall it is more closely in line with that of other pupils nationally.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management board, and the director of children's services for Islington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lambern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you as headteacher together with the executive headteacher, middle leaders, teachers and support staff. They also met with the chair of the management board and two other governors. Inspectors spoke to pupils, parents, senior medical professionals, representatives from the local authority and the school's link governor. They visited a number of sessions at both sites during the day, gathering evidence on teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, minutes of meetings, information on the progress of pupils and the single central record of recruitment checks undertaken on staff. Inspectors also took account of responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View.