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Mrs Nell Giles
Head of school
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Dear Mrs Giles

Short inspection of Southampton Children's Hospital School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2017 with Andrew Penman, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

In the relatively short time that you have been at the school, you have had a very positive impact. Wisely, you have built on the work of the executive headteacher to develop a culture where only the best will do for the children in your care. Staff admire your proactive, energetic and efficient approach to secure important changes to teaching and learning. Teachers appreciate the opportunities that they have had to visit other schools and reflect on their own practice. Some staff members described the school as 'a great place to work', and 'amazingly supportive'. Leaders, governors and the academy trust are ambitious for the school and have rightly set high expectations for pupils' learning. Everyone shares a precise understanding of the school's effectiveness. This is coupled with a highly analytical approach to tackling aspects of the school that require further development. Consequently, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection and the school is continuing to improve.

You put strong relationships at the heart of everything that you do. Staff from the hospital and the school work well together to share information about pupils' well-being and readiness to learn. You take time to build close relationships with families and provide them with valuable support at a difficult time in their lives. Staff and pupils interact very well together, providing what one parent described as 'just the right balance of care and learning'. One pupil proudly displayed his 'headteacher's award' for excellent work in English and mathematics alongside many certificates for

success in a mathematics programme. Parents recognise that the school provides wide-ranging support for pupils' personal development as well as their learning. One parent stated, 'The school couldn't do any more.'

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors noted that pupils' behaviour and attendance were strengths of the school. This continues to be the case. Despite some pupils experiencing disruption to their education or anxiety about school, with the support of staff they settle in to lessons and show increasing resilience. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils listen extremely well and treat each other with care and respect. Leaders have addressed effectively the previous area for improvement. Governors have benefited from support and training from the academy trust. Furthermore, the chair of governors has relevant experience in education. She ensures that governors keep a close eye on pupils' progress and provide leaders with appropriate challenge to secure further improvements. Teaching continues to be good. Nevertheless, you know that there is still some work to do to make the best use of the new and enthusiastic middle leaders to improve teaching and learning further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Together with the hospital and pupils' 'home schools', you have established clear procedures to help keep pupils safe. You provide staff with very effective training when they join the school and at regular intervals so that they know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil. There are well-established expectations for staff working in Bursledon House, on the wards and in outreach that promote pupils' safety. Through close relationships with families, you are able to support the hospital to provide effective early help for pupils, should they need it. Recruitment checks on staff are up to date and meet current requirements. The safeguarding governor has a secure understanding of both hospital and school safeguarding procedures. She uses this knowledge very well to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of a high quality.

You set a clear expectation that everyone is responsible for safeguarding. You even extend this to pupils and take time to equip them with skills to keep themselves safe. For example, staff help pupils to learn about topics such as right-wing extremism through sharing news stories and promoting discussions at a level that is right for pupils' ages and understanding. Parent surveys report that pupils feel safe at school. This is because expectations of pupils' behaviour and levels of care and personal attention are high. Consequently, there have been very few incidents of poor behaviour, bullying or racism.

Inspection findings

- It is evident that leaders have secured important improvements in the school since the last inspection. Staff from the school and the hospital now work well together to advance pupils' learning. For example, therapists and teachers attend the weekly cookery lesson where pupils make food such as a 'rainbow salad'. Joint lessons such as this help all staff to share expertise, understand and match support more closely to pupils' individual needs.

- You have introduced two middle leaders who have developed the quality of teaching and learning. Each leader has taken action to ensure that pupils in the primary and secondary provision receive a curriculum that is appropriate to their age and ability. They work closely with teachers to help them plan lessons so that the curriculum is consistent across the different parts of the school. Middle leaders also work with you to check the quality of teaching and learning. This provides helpful feedback to staff that enables them to improve their teaching. However, the middle leaders are relatively new and have not yet had the opportunity to extend their skills or drive improvements beyond those set out for them in the school development plan.
- During the inspection, we saw that teachers use assessment well to advance pupils' learning. Consequently, pupils' books show that they make good progress in a range of subjects. You establish strong links with pupils' 'home schools' to understand their achievement so far and identify any gaps in their learning. This helps teachers to provide most pupils with personalised pathways through the curriculum that address their individual needs. In lessons, teachers check pupils' understanding well with questions such as 'How would the igneous rock get inside the sedimentary rock?' Teachers follow the assessment guidelines carefully to track pupils' progress through the curriculum and identify some helpful next steps. Nevertheless, leaders at all levels recognise that staff do not yet have a full enough understanding of the higher expectations of the new national curriculum and GCSE exams. This reduces their ability to challenge pupils fully.
- There are very effective systems in place to support pupils as they move into and out of the school. Leaders have ensured that staff focus on advancing pupils' learning regardless of the duration of time that pupils spend at the school. When pupils join the school, you gather as much information as possible from their 'home school' and parents about each individual and share this with staff. As a result, little time is wasted so that pupils make good progress. When pupils leave, detailed and personalised plans support their re-integration back into their 'home school'. Parents and staff from pupils' 'home schools' report that this process is 'smooth' and based on 'excellent communication'. Consequently, pupils leave well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the skills of middle leaders are developed so that they can have a greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning
- teachers better understand how to challenge pupils and accelerate their progress effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We held meetings with you, the executive headteacher, two middle leaders, a governor and a representative of the academy trust. I also spoke to the chair of governors on the telephone. We visited some lessons, jointly with you or the executive headteacher, to look at teaching and learning in different parts of the hospital. We looked at pupils' work in their exercise books. We spoke informally to several pupils. We took into account four responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to four parents in person or on the telephone. We evaluated a range of documents, including minutes of the governing body meetings and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.