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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Claire Jones
Headteacher
Ashgate Croft School
Ashgate Road
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S40 4BN

Dear Mrs Jones

Short inspection of Ashgate Croft School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 2017 with Andy Lakatos, 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have successfully improved the quality of leadership at all levels. As a result, weaknesses in teaching are eradicated quickly to ensure that all pupils make strong progress from their starting points. The governing board is very effective. Governors challenge school leaders to ensure that pupils' progress remains outstanding through the school.

You continually develop the curriculum in order to meet the needs of all pupils. Pupils have opportunities to learn personal skills which support their development. The pupils are set personal targets, which are increasingly being embedded into the targets outlined in the pupils' education, health and care plans. These personal targets promote pupils' independence skills for everyday routines, including communication and social skills. They are shared with parents. Parents are very supportive of the school's work, and the large majority would recommend the school.

Older pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education and supported living. The Croft building enables pupils to learn life skills in the home. Pupils learn to cook, garden and make their own beds to prepare them for independent living. They also learn to work in a group and cooperate with each other to share the tasks. As a result, the pupils become confident young adults and are well equipped for their futures.

At the last inspection, the inspectors asked you to develop the leadership skills of the

middle leaders. You have put in place a range of training opportunities which have given middle leaders the skills to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The leadership of communication is very strong. There are a range of techniques used to enable the pupils to express their views. Since the last inspection, middle leaders have been promoted to senior positions at the school or at other schools. Consequently, you have now put in place bespoke training to develop the new middle leaders. The capacity for further improvement is very strong. The very large majority of staff said that the school is extremely well led and managed.

Following this visit, I have asked that you further develop the teaching of phonics. You have already identified this as a priority and started to send teachers out to other schools to learn from good practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders take prompt action if a concern is raised about a child. Staff are highly vigilant, know the pupils very well and report concerns as they arise. Staff attend a wide range of courses about safeguarding to ensure that there is a breadth of knowledge in the school. Leaders work well with a range of agencies, including social care, to keep pupils safe. A chronology sheet of all the actions that leaders have taken is kept at the front of each pupil's file. Files are securely stored.

The governing board checks closely that the school is following safeguarding procedures. The chair of the governing board, who is the link governor for safeguarding, attends training and completes an annual audit of the school's practice with school leaders. Following the audit, an action plan is developed and monitored at governing board meetings. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The recording of physical interventions is detailed and thorough. Leaders track the frequency of incidents in school and for individual pupils. Senior leaders are each responsible for a group of classes and monitor the behaviour patterns of pupils closely. When an incident has occurred with a pupil, staff complete a form which is then checked by leaders using the pupil's behaviour plan. If leaders do not feel that staff have used the strategies set out in a pupil's behaviour plan to manage the incident, they investigate further. Pupils' behaviour plans are sent home to allow parents to contribute. Behaviour plans and risks assessments are reviewed regularly if a pupil's behaviour is not improving. As a result of the actions that all staff take, the school is a very calm and orderly environment. Fixed-term exclusions are very low. The large majority of staff and parents feel that pupils' behaviour is managed well. All pupils who spoke with the inspectors said that staff manage pupils' behaviour well.

Pupils said that they can talk to someone in school if they are worried. They said that bullying has reduced following the work of the anti-bullying committee. Pupils said that they have friends at school and enjoy it. They have the opportunity to take part in 'Positive Play' to support their emotional and social development. The school has achieved the Rights Respecting Schools Award level 1 from UNICEF for respecting the rights of pupils.

The recruitment of staff is very rigorous. Any gaps in applicants' employment history are checked. All the other necessary checks have been carried out and dated. The recruitment files of staff are well organised.

Inspection findings

- All leaders are improving the school. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely to check that the needs of all pupils are being met. There is a comprehensive and highly successful programme of training in place for all staff, to enable them to improve their performance. The performance-management process is rigorous and only good performance is rewarded. Leaders' actions to improve teaching have been successful and have enabled pupils to continue to make strong progress.
- Leaders closely monitor the pupils' progress and put apt interventions in place if a pupil is at risk of underachieving. Conversely, if a pupil has met their target, the targets are increased immediately to offer further challenge. Pupils' progress is outstanding from their different starting points.
- Teachers are very enthusiastic and most successfully engage pupils in learning. They use praise to motivate pupils and a range of communication techniques to allow pupils to express themselves. Pupils are able to communicate their responses through a variety of ways. These include eye-gaze, using picture symbols, signing and recorded messages. Teaching assistants support pupils' learning extremely well, following the teachers' very useful advice to ensure a consistent approach to learning.
- The governing board has received extensive training from the local authority. The impact of this is evident through its very comprehensive monitoring of the school's work. Governors ask searching and pertinent questions of leaders to check that the school's provision continues to be outstanding. They particularly analyse pupils' performance and have a very good knowledge of how well pupils are achieving in each key stage.
- The curriculum is successfully tailored to meet the needs of the pupils. Teachers provide a sensory curriculum for pupils who have severe and complex learning needs and sensory and/or physical needs. This develops pupils' responsiveness to different situations. In one class, a teacher used a spray to enable pupils to smell the scent and identify what day of the week it was. The sensory garden, which is maintained by pupils, greatly enhances this part of the curriculum.
- Pupils who have physical needs have access to physiotherapy, and staff are trained in a programme to develop pupils' core stability to help them move more easily. Through this provision, pupils make very strong progress in their physical development.
- Pupils have access to appropriate reading books. However, leaders have identified that the teaching of phonics needs to improve further to promote pupils' reading and writing skills. Currently, pupils, particularly the most able pupils, do not get enough opportunities to practise saying the letter sounds and linking the sound to the shape of letters. Consequently, pupils' strategies for reading unknown words are not as well

developed as they should be.

- Older pupils have the opportunity to take part in work experience. Pupils sell refreshments to the local community in the Ashgate Cafe. Pupils also have the opportunity to go into the community each week. They have visited the local sports centre and asked what activities are available. In addition, pupils have studied local signposts to know where local buildings are, including the local college. Pupils receive independent careers advice. They are knowledgeable about the courses and the colleges available to meet their aspirations. All pupils in Year 14 achieved an externally accredited qualification last year, and the vast majority have moved onto further education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics is further improved, particularly for the most able pupils, so that pupils can make more accelerated progress with their reading and writing skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met with you, the acting deputy headteacher, one of the designated leads for safeguarding, the middle leaders responsible for communication, English and mathematics, and members of the teaching and non-teaching staff. We observed the pupils on arrival, met some parents, visited most of the classes, spoke with pupils, and looked at pupils' current work and compared it to the targets in their education, health and care plans. We studied your school development plan, your self-evaluation, and the minutes of the local governing board meetings. We reviewed records of behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. We considered the 13 responses to Parent View and the four responses to the Ofsted free text service. We also considered the 15 responses to the pupils' survey and the 87 responses to the staff survey.