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Mrs Jenny McConnell
Principal Designate
Dawn House School
Helmsley Road
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Dear Mrs McConnell

Short inspection of Dawn House School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Liz Moore, 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 March 2014.

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 been acting principal since April 2017. During a period of change, leaders and governors have sustained a culture of aspiration and high levels of staff engagement. Leadership and local governance are strengths of the school.

You lead a very motivated and committed team who consistently promote good and often outstanding progress to meet the outcomes identified for pupils. Staff have a clear sense of pride in the school and understand their role in contributing to its continued success. The director of education for I CAN, the children's communication charity, said, 'The team are tenacious in their approach and I have every confidence they have the capacity to sustain the rapid improvements made.' Leaders and other key adults have a detailed understanding of the educational and care needs of pupils. This enables them to provide pupils with a personalised programme of learning and prepare them for their next steps. You have been successful in building the staff's knowledge, experience and skills to ensure that the new curriculum plans take fully into account the changing needs and expectations of the pupils and their parents and carers.

Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection. In particular, you have secured rapid progress for primary pupils over time. Leaders and governors know the strengths of the school, as well as the key areas

for further improvement. There are detailed plans in place to sustain the rapid momentum for improvement. Leaders are keen to develop the broad and deep curriculum experiences and opportunities for all pupils further and to promote excellence and high-quality aspirational outcomes throughout the school. The newly formed and highly skilled well-being team is quickly able to identify pupils who are in need of support and put suitable intervention plans in place. Importantly, these plans always include information about the family and the pupils' wishes.

Parents who provided information to the inspectors are unanimously positive about the school. The school 'plaudits' file supports this finding. Parents are confident their children will flourish and are safe because staff take time to listen and help them to succeed. One parent stated, 'The school is outstanding and absolutely amazing, we can now live as a normal family.'

The chair of the governing body is passionate about further improving the life chances of all pupils who attend the school. Recent minutes of the governing body meetings show that governors ask challenging questions and increasingly hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

Curriculum leaders talked confidently about their role in bringing about further improvements to whole-school outcomes. Pupils, regardless of their starting points or disadvantage, make strong progress. The subject leaders for English and mathematics, supported by the wider team, have taken time to assess and evaluate the changes needed for their current pupils. A precise 'small-steps' approach to assessment, tracking and evaluation is in place for each pupil. The impact of this ensures that the curriculum is personalised and leads to strong progress for all pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and administrators have ensured that safeguarding takes high priority. Pupils are happy, safe and well cared for. Ensuring that their views are valued is a core part of the school's ethos.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding policies are fit for purpose. Training for staff ensures that they fully understand the risks that pupils may be vulnerable to and the systems to keep them safe. Records scrutinised were detailed and included all the required information. In all case files viewed, there is evidence of a rigorous follow-up with external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Records are stored securely.

Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are rare. Those involving physical interventions are clearly documented and risk-assessed, and any action taken as a result is always discussed with the pupil. Pupils' views and responses are represented and recorded. This is particularly effective for those pupils who find communication difficult.

Leaders and those responsible for safeguarding ensure that recruitment procedures

and protocols are robust. Like other aspects of the school's work, leaders regularly review the arrangements for safeguarding to ensure that they are effective. This includes monitoring by external agencies.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked particularly at whether leaders have maintained a high standard of education since the last inspection. We reviewed the use of the extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils and to help Year 7 pupils catch up, and the quality of the curriculum at key stages 2 and 3. We considered whether pupils are effectively prepared for their next stage in life.
- Leaders have ensured that achievement across the school remains high. In key stages 4 and 5, pupils are increasingly gaining qualifications that allow them to continue their learning on personalised or specialist courses. These qualifications enable them to develop independence and resilience, and prepare them for living on their own or in supported environments.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning focus sharply on whether teaching helps pupils continue to achieve well. Consequently, there is a continued focus on ensuring that pupils are making the best possible progress.
- Some aspects of the school's self-evaluation lack clarity. This means that governors cannot hold leaders to account for all aspects of their work.
- Disadvantaged pupils receive very effective support. Consequently, there is no measureable difference between how well these pupils achieve compared to others. One example of how funding is used is to develop pupils' well-being. Pupils and parents value this support highly.
- The outcomes for different groups of pupils are consistently strong. Staff are effective in improving pupils' speech and language skills. This includes pupils who are eligible for Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding.
- The curriculum in the primary phase and in key stage 3 focuses on developing basic skills in English, communication and number and offers a range of enrichment and therapeutic activities. This rich curriculum, coupled with personalised targets for success, enables pupils to thrive.
- Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are well informed about future careers and life choices and well prepared for their next steps in education, employment and/or independent living. The targets set for them are personalised and enable them to experience success. School staff work with other agencies to support pupils effectively during and after their transition. Consequently, all pupils to date have made a successful transition to their next step.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop the school's self-evaluation to enable governors to hold leaders to account more precisely.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Nixon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the chair of the governing body, the head of education, the head of care, the assistant head, the head of assessment services, the therapy team lead, the school business manager, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, the head of the sixth form and members of teaching and non-teaching staff. We observed pupils arriving in the morning, visited classes and groups, spoke with pupils, looked at and scrutinised pupils' current work (books and portfolios) and compared it to the curriculum and their targets and outcomes detailed in their education, health and care plans. We undertook joint learning walks with leaders and the chair of the governing body.

We studied and discussed the school's self-evaluation and improvement documentation. We scrutinised records of behaviour interventions, risk assessments, attendance records and safeguarding information. We considered the 10 responses to the Ofsted free-text service. There were no responses to consider from the staff or pupils'/students' survey and no responses were viewable on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.