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Mr Jon Hewitt
Headteacher
The Castle School
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Dear Mr Hewitt

Short inspection of The Castle School

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 2019 with Hilary Goddard, 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 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 and your leaders are passionate about striving to improve the outcomes and life chances for pupils. You continually reflect on ways to provide the best education possible for the children in your care. You rightly place the child at the centre of everything you do and, as a result, pupils make excellent progress. All staff have in-depth knowledge of the individual needs of pupils and hold high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Parents are extremely positive about the progress their children have made since joining the school, with one parent stating: 'Castle School is an amazing school and my child has progressed more than I could ever have hoped for.'

Staff are highly motivated and enjoy working at the school. They know that you and other leaders value the excellent work that they do. Staff rightly appreciate the work that is being done to ensure staff well-being. They are very well trained and feel exceptionally well supported. Excellent relationships were evident between staff and pupils during this inspection, and staff know the pupils extremely well. The staff demonstrate patience and care at all times and are dedicated to encouraging pupils to be as independent as possible.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths as well as the areas you wish to develop. Their strategic oversight and insight provides effective challenge to the school.

Your focus on preparing pupils for the next stage of their education and employment is a strong feature throughout the school. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to develop skills which improve their chances of a fulfilling life in the future. The curriculum provides experiences which challenge pupils to use the skills they have developed in school. This is particularly evident with the older pupils, who are able to demonstrate confidence and aptitude in accessing work experience and successfully moving onto college and into employment.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is a culture of safeguarding throughout the school, which is reflected in the care and attention given to all pupils. Pupils' safety and well-being have the highest priority for all staff.

The designated safeguarding officers are knowledgeable, both in relation to safeguarding practice and about the pupils in the school. Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained to support the pupils in their care. Appropriate and timely training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about potential risks.

Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The safeguarding governor has attended appropriate training. She visits the school and meets regularly with the designated safeguarding officer to maintain oversight and scrutiny of relevant processes.

All staff have a strong working knowledge of safeguarding issues and understand the risks to pupils. They engage closely with parents, carers and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

The systems to safeguard pupils are robust and are monitored rigorously by leaders, who take swift action when safeguarding concerns are raised. Attendance is high and any absences are followed up. The curriculum reflects the strong safeguarding ethos of the school. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through managing their own feelings as well as being alert to dangers beyond the school, particularly online. They are taught the communication skills they need to express their worries and anxieties.

Pupils say that they feel safe and know that they can share any concerns with an adult. Parents agree that their children are safe in school and that they are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make exceptionally strong progress during their time at the school, both academically and personally. Clear embedded routines, the knowledge of expert staff, and creative and flexible approaches enable all pupils to be as independent as possible. Individual learning plans are used effectively in supporting pupils to achieve positive outcomes in all areas. The plans reflect close working with

therapists to ensure that each pupil is able to improve their independence, mobility and communication skills. Teachers continually assess pupils' achievements and gaps in their learning to identify appropriate next steps. The school's systems for monitoring pupils' progress are thorough and comprehensive, and leaders use pupils' assessment information effectively to shape the school's development strategies. As a result you have identified that progress in reading is not as strong as in the other core areas.

- The curriculum is engaging and fun, with a broad range of activities to motivate pupils in lessons. Learning activities are designed to meet the individual needs of pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy learning, are able to sustain their concentration, and develop skills and understanding in line with the high expectations set for them.
- The curriculum is enhanced by trips and links with the community which contribute significantly to increasing pupil independence. Parents fully appreciate the opportunities offered to their children and how these engaging activities help them to make excellent progress and prepare them for their future life. One parent told inspectors that her child had progressed from being unable to speak or read to being a narrator in the school play. All children are included in whole-school activities such as sports day or the school play, some appearing on video or using switches to communicate. The 'world of work' is a key area of the curriculum and recognised as a best practice model of delivery, with significantly higher-than-average numbers of pupils on supported internships or gaining employment.
- You provide staff with a wide range of professional development opportunities and ensure that they feel nurtured and supported. Staff appreciate the value that you place on them and, as a result, teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled and effective in supporting pupils in their learning. Teamwork is embedded in the culture of the school, and working together successfully further enhances the high-quality teaching and learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a consistent approach to the teaching of reading so that all pupils make even stronger progress, which is in line with the other core areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Johns
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We considered a range of school information, including the school's self-evaluation, the current school improvement plan, and minutes of governing body meetings. We discussed your assessment of pupils' progress across the school, and you shared with us evidence of your assessment process. We evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies, the single central register of checks on staff, and a sample of safeguarding files. We looked at attendance and behaviour records.

During the day inspectors met with you, other members of the leadership team, and staff. I also had a discussion with the chair of governors and spoke to your school improvement partner by telephone. Inspectors conducted learning walks with members of the senior leadership team. We visited classrooms across all key stages, where we had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. I met formally with a group of staff, and spoke with a number of parents to hear their views. I also took account of the seven free-text comments and the 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I considered 77 responses to the staff survey and 14 responses to the pupil survey.