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Mrs Peggy Murphy
Principal
Five Acre Wood School
Boughton Lane
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Dear Mrs Murphy

Short inspection of Five Acre Wood School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 2019 with Ofsted Inspector Catherine Davies, 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 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Through your inspirational leadership, you have created a strong community of continuing excellence. Your leadership team, staff and governors are passionate about the school and have high aspirations for the pupils. Together, you expect your pupils to achieve high academic standards, but you also recognise the importance of developing their personal, social, communication and independence skills. As a result, pupils thrive in this school and are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.

The school meets the often extremely complex needs of its pupils well. The development of staff is a major priority of the school and is key to its success. All staff are fully trained to support the pupils. This has become of increasing importance, given the widening range of health and care needs that pupils have. Staff have a comprehensive knowledge of individual pupils and understand the learning approach that best suits each pupil's needs. They use this knowledge effectively to produce challenging, bespoke programmes. These support pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to make excellent progress from their starting points, both in their academic and personal development.

Pupils told us that they are very happy at school and are proud to belong to this community. Pupils are pleased with their achievements and enjoy their lessons. In joint lesson observations with leaders, we saw high levels of engagement from

pupils. The behaviour of pupils was exemplary, and they joined in the learning activities enthusiastically. The vast majority of parents and carers who completed the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, believe that the school keeps pupils safe and happy. One parent said:

'My child has made amazing progress at this school. Communication between myself and the school is highly effective. I feel the school has a strong leadership, who make time for every one of their pupils.'

The governing body is a highly skilled team with a relentless focus on raising standards to ensure outstanding outcomes for all pupils. It presents a high degree of challenge to senior leaders, and individual governors regularly carry out monitoring visits. The governing body knows the school well, holds leaders to account effectively and sets aspirational targets for the school's improvement.

At the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted the school's many strengths. They also recommended that the school develops even better links with other establishments in order to provide additional learning opportunities for pupils. Leaders have responded to this and have set up two satellite provisions. One is based on a primary school site for most-able key stage 2 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans. The other is based on a secondary school site, catering for most-able pupils in key stages 3 and 4 with an EHC plan. It also houses the provision for most of the sixth-form students. The school's satellite provisions are being developed and expanded. From September 2019, the primary satellite will be relocating and expanding to include provision for key stage 1 pupils as well as key stage 2 pupils, and capacity will be increased at the secondary and sixth-form satellite. Leaders rightly recognise the importance of ensuring that the ethos and uniqueness that characterise Five Acre Wood are replicated in all of these settings.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a very strong safeguarding culture in the school. The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are secure and in place. Meticulous recruitment and background checks are carried out to ensure that all adults are suitable to work with pupils. Record-keeping is thorough, and any concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively. The school has a comprehensive induction programme for new staff, ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of their responsibilities with regard to keeping pupils safe. The school has strong links with outside agencies and works in close and effective collaboration with them to provide support for pupils and families. Independent external reviews of safeguarding are used to check that the school's arrangements are robust. As a result, governors are confident that the school is effective and proactive in its work to safeguard pupils.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when online. This enables them to make positive choices when using the internet and social media sites outside of school. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum is rich and highly tailored to meet pupils' needs and provides an excellent holistic learning experience. Leaders have recognised that pupils' individual complex needs require particular learning approaches to enable pupils to maximise their potential. Consequently, leaders have developed six different learning approaches: an early years approach for Nursery and Reception children; a sensory approach for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties; a practical approach for pupils with severe learning difficulties; a formal approach for pupils with moderate learning difficulties or complex needs; a structured approach which tends to cater for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and a functional approach for sixth-form students. Pupils with ASD can potentially follow any of the approaches depending on their individual learning needs. Pupils engage fully with the opportunities and experiences provided through their individual learning pathway and the well-planned curriculum. Pupils are enabled to make outstanding academic progress, alongside the development of their communication and independence skills, and the enhancement of their well-being.
- The school uses a variety of methods to assess pupils' development. For all pupils, assessment evaluates their academic achievements and their progress towards achieving their EHC plan targets. For the less able pupils, leaders analyse other indicators, including the development of their communication skills. Additionally, for pupils who follow the formal or practical learning approach, leaders have devised a key skills framework. This incredibly comprehensive assessment system provides information which is used to devise individual targets for pupils. These targets are both achievable and ambitious. Where pupils are not making the progress planned for, carefully devised interventions are put in place. As a result, the school's most recent assessment information shows that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make very strong progress.
- The leadership of the sixth form is strong. The quality of education for students in the sixth form is successful because they are provided with the right learning approach and curriculum suited to their needs. The curriculum provision is unwavering in its focus on preparing students for life beyond school and independent living. Staff consider each student's strengths and needs before identifying the objectives for their learning programmes. Students make excellent progress and gain accredited qualifications and unit awards. These are determined by their interests and abilities. Students take part in a range of work-related activities and also enjoy their involvement with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. There are rich opportunities for students to engage with a wide range of external pre-employment activities, such as creating a community garden at the railway station, working alongside Kent community rail partnership. Students in the sixth form are well prepared for their future destinations. Leaders work tirelessly with parents and providers to ensure that all students progress confidently to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- All leaders and governors recognise the importance of good attendance, both in keeping pupils safe and giving them the best opportunity to achieve well in

school and beyond. The complex medical needs of some pupils mean that there are times when illness causes them to be absent. You and your staff work closely with medical professionals to help support these pupils and their families. For others whose attendance causes concern, comprehensive controls and policies are in place to ensure the safety and well-being of each pupil. As a result, pupils' attendance is good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- with the expansion over three sites, the ethos and uniqueness of this school are replicated in all of its provisions.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Conway
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, my colleague and I met with you, the school's leadership team, a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and the local authority's adviser. We visited classes in all key stages to observe pupils learning, talk with pupils about their progress and look at their books. All lesson observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team.

We spoke to a group of pupils. We looked at 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 30 free-text comments. We also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys from seven pupils and 99 members of staff. We looked at a range of documentation, including information about: the work of governors; safeguarding; the curriculum; and assessment. We examined the school's analysis of pupils' progress and attainment, leaders' self-evaluation and their plans for improvement.