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Mrs Janet Kellett
Headteacher
Bishopswood School
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Dear Mrs Kellett

Short inspection of Bishopswood School

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Emma Phillips, 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 good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Along with your fellow leaders, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

As a team, you demonstrate the capacity to improve the school even further. Staff know the individual needs of pupils and so the school provides well for them. Pupils make strong progress in their learning and wider development as a result of consistently effective teaching. Pupils enjoy their lessons and concentrate on their work. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, praised the staff's 'amazing skills'. One parent wrote, 'I couldn't be happier with the school'.

As a headteacher new to the school since the last inspection, you are assisted well by your leadership team and governors. You work effectively with support from your local authority to identify and address priorities for improvement. You are a caring and strategic leader, complemented by a committed team of staff across all three sites. The governing body quizzes you to ensure that governors have a complete understanding of what leaders are doing and that all leaders' actions are effective and in pupils' best interests. You have managed the recent changes in staff well, following the retirement of some well-established teachers and leaders. You have also helped the school to adapt to its growing number of pupils on roll by creating more classrooms from the limited space that is available to you. You and your assistant headteacher are continuing to build a positive working relationship with

the new management team at the secondary school with which you are co-located.

Since becoming headteacher, you have increased the opportunities that staff have to develop their skills. This has been of particular importance given the increase in range of medical needs that pupils have. You supported the assistant headteacher in further developing the key stage 4 curriculum to include off-site activities, such as work experience at a local garden centre. Pupils and parents appreciate this change to the curriculum. They believe that this practical way of learning has supported pupils' progress in the core subjects of English and mathematics in particular. The after-school club enables pupils to improve their social and communication skills.

Leaders have worked successfully to improve areas identified for attention at the last inspection. Staff now make good use of communication aids, including technology, so that all pupils have a voice and can make choices and respond to questions. Leaders have improved the use of assessment information so that they can identify how well the different groups of pupils at the school are achieving. However, they recognise that pupils, particularly the most able, and support staff do not always have a sufficiently clear understanding of the next steps that will accelerate learning over time.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed. Governors and staff understand their responsibilities and regard safeguarding as a high priority. All receive relevant and timely induction and training. Adults in the school know and follow the correct procedures for passing on any concerns to those responsible for safeguarding. Staff, pupils and parents report that pupils are safe in the school. A variety of ways of communicating are used to keep pupils safe in the buildings. Adults supervise pupils well at all three of the school's sites. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when using a computer. Parents are also informed of how to keep their children safe.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we discussed and agreed our focus areas for the day. These included looking at the use of communication aids, and how well leaders know the progress made by pupils and what this progress looks like. We also agreed to consider what leaders are doing to improve pupils' attendance and how effective safeguarding procedures are in the school.
- Extensive training enables staff to make best use of the school's chosen communication aids. Staff across all three sites use symbols and sign language to support learning through clear communication with pupils. Since the previous inspection, this is now consistent and embedded. For example, all adults wear lanyards with a vast array of symbols on them, and 'now and next' boards are used well to support pupils with significant needs regarding transitions. A small number of pupils in the early years class are also being taught to use symbols to communicate. Some of the most able pupils at the other two sites could be given

more responsibility in using communication aids themselves.

- Staff use symbols to allow pupils to indicate the amount of support required to access a task or make choices. Pupils are able to use symbols alongside the written word to help support their reading. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of these communication aids carefully. Parent governors liaise with other parents to find out how well pupils are able to communicate at school and at home.
- Leaders use information from pupils' previous schools to correctly identify their initial learning needs. Regular checks by staff on pupils' progress enable appropriate extra help to be put in place where needed. Staff make sure that this additional support is making a difference, adapting their approaches when necessary.
- Governors know which groups of pupils are making good progress and challenge the headteacher appropriately about those who are not. Early years staff, in particular, have very clear processes in place to share pupils' progress with parents and carers. Most pupils make good progress in English but their progress in mathematics is often more modest. Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics than their peers.
- Parents believe that their children are supported well at the school, and one parent said that staff had 'helped me and my son beyond expectations'. Pupils' behaviour is consistently positive due to clear expectations from staff. As a result, pupils show a very high level of engagement with learning at all three sites.
- All adults promote a high level of independence for pupils. For example, pupils' work shows how much help has been given with a task and suggests that the level of adult support required is reducing over time. Some teachers question pupils well, allowing them to assess what has been learned and where there are still gaps that need addressing. Despite this, pupils and support staff do not always know what needs to be done to improve a piece of work. This sometimes hinders the rate of pupils' progress, including that of the most able.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is now consistently above the national average for special schools. Leaders have a comprehensive system in place which enables them to act quickly when attendance is too low. Where individual medical needs contribute to high levels of absence, leaders take appropriate action to address this, such as providing teaching at home during planned periods of absence. Doctor's appointments are also held in the school to ensure that pupils are not missing any more time at school than is necessary. Governors look carefully at patterns in pupils' absence and challenge the headteacher as to what is being done to improve the attendance of individuals where appropriate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils and support staff routinely know what pupils' next steps in learning are
- pupils' progress in mathematics accelerates to become as rapid as it is in English.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Cateridge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your assistant headteacher, and separately with a group of governors, including the chair. Inspectors visited seven lessons, accompanied by one of the school's leadership team, to observe learning and look at pupils' work. I met with five pupils, and one of them showed me around the primary school site. We took account of 16 staff survey responses, six pupil survey responses and 16 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' analysis of pupils' progress data and safeguarding policies and procedures. I also spoke by telephone with the local authority officer linked to the school.