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Stephen Houlton-Allen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Houlton-Allen

### **Short inspection of The Collett School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2018 with Jackie Mullan, 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 good in February 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

At the time of the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school, including your strong leadership, the excellent relationships between pupils and staff and the good to outstanding progress that pupils were making. These strengths have been maintained.

With the support of senior and middle leaders, you have tackled the few areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the time. Pupils acquire new knowledge rapidly and staff ensure that well-planned activities meet pupils' varied needs. The roles of middle and subject leaders have been strengthened. They diligently check the quality of provision, teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility.

Almost all parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, spoke to the inspectors individually or sent text messages are effusive about your leadership. Here are some of the comments that you may rightly be proud of:

- 'The Collett School has been my son's salvation.'
- 'Staff are jumping on my child's interest.'

- 'Our son's educational achievements, confidence and well-being have improved dramatically since attending this extraordinary school.'
- 'The leadership of the headteacher is superb.'
- 'This is a fabulous school, with an inspirational headteacher.'
- 'The school has exemplary leadership.'

You are totally committed to ensuring that all pupils do as well as they can. During our joint visits to classrooms, pupils rushed to speak to you and to the inspectors. They showed great confidence and were proud of their work. The school is a very happy place for them. Pupils' responses to your own school's survey are very positive.

Your excellent networking with the local community is one of your successes. The external expertise, resources and additional funding are improving the quality of the learning environment and the breadth of curricular experiences for your pupils. The preparation of pupils for the world of work and transition to post-16 education are exemplary. The well-planned use of information technology in class and the availability of laptops accelerate pupils' progress in communication and writing.

Teachers and support staff work effectively together to help pupils achieve as highly as possible. Some teachers are particularly pleased that support staff now stay with the same class. This provides continuity for pupils and a deeper understanding of their learning and emotional needs.

Support staff are very conscientious and, at times, pupils are not given enough opportunity to find things out for themselves, especially as they get older. One parent explained this well when she said that 'staff need to back off at times'. More balance is required in order to meet the school's key priority of promoting pupils' independence.

You have devised your own effective system to assess pupils' progress. This system is effective because all subjects are given equal importance and staff use performance information effectively to move pupils' learning on. With the expert knowledge of subject leaders, you are checking each pupil's progress across the curriculum very carefully through frequent progress meetings.

The process that governors use to examine the school's strengths and areas for further improvement ensures that their evaluation is precise and accurate. This is one of the reasons why the school is continuously improving because, with their advice and expertise, you quickly identify what could be better. You are far from complacent.

You are aware that the school is encountering a few personnel issues at the moment. Pupils are central to your decisions and these challenges are not affecting their learning and well-being. A few staff and parents are concerned about the help you are giving to other local special schools. They feel that clarity of roles and quality of leadership are lacking when you are off site. Communication with staff and parents requires some consolidation to ensure that everyone pulls together for the continued success of the school.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Staff ensure that pupils are, and feel, safe at school. Supervision is very well organised during break and lunchtime. There is excellent attention to detail. For example, transport arrangements are well orchestrated to ensure pupils' safety and welfare.

You have identified the specific safety risks that exist for pupils in your care, such as checking attendance when it is not as good as it should be. Staff are trained to meet pupils' specific emotional and behavioural needs. The curriculum offers many opportunities for pupils to understand how to stay safe, including when online or using social media.

The designated safeguarding leader ensures that all arrangements for safeguarding and for pupils' welfare are fit for purpose and kept under continuous review. The family liaison and support workers maintain frequent contact with families to enable the prompt exchange of information related to individual pupils. Links with external agencies are effective.

A very small number of staff and parents are concerned about procedures to safeguard pupils and manage challenging behaviour. Some staff say that concerns are reported but not acted upon. We found that leaders take safeguarding very seriously. However, communication must be improved so that decisions and outcomes of investigations are understood by all.

## **Inspection findings**

- At our first meeting, we agreed several key lines of enquiry to ascertain that the school remained at least good. You succinctly presented the marked improvement that had been achieved in several areas. Inspectors were able to check this out during the day.
- Pupils behave impeccably. The way teachers manage the learning to meet pupils' multiple needs is exemplary. Staff ask probing questions. There is huge excitement for learning in class. The pupils who spoke to us were very clear about what they were doing. This first-hand evidence appears to indicate that the effectiveness of teaching and the impact of your leadership have improved strongly since the previous inspection.
- Assessment is a strength. The school's system provides a clear baseline that teachers use to build on pupils' existing knowledge and to identify where pupils could do better. The weekly training of support staff ensures that all adults make a full contribution to pupils' progress. Staff need to check whether more independence could be provided to pupils in some areas.
- The broader responsibilities you have recently taken on, as part of the association of The Collet School with two other local schools, are not affecting the quality of leadership. This is because senior and middle managers have the necessary knowledge and skills to support your work. Governors are keeping a close eye on these recent developments. As reported at the time of the previous

inspection, governors are holding you to account. They check the school's work and the impact of their decisions very carefully. Nonetheless, communication with some parents and clarity about everyone's responsibilities are not as strong as they could be.

- The curriculum prepares pupils extremely well for the next stage of their learning and for the world of work or further studies. Transition from lower to middle and from middle to the upper school is seamless. Pupils often learn in classes with pupils of different ages. This contributes well to their personal development. Middle leaders and subject leaders can be rightly proud of the curriculum they have devised. Topics are based on pupils' interests and, in many lessons, pupils all want to have a go and are excited about their work.
- Staff have good-quality links with local colleges that support pupils' successful transition from school to college. Over time, more pupils have been entered for GCSEs. A wide range of pathways are offered to ensure that all pupils have a chance to obtain worthwhile accreditations. The impact of your external links, from small local businesses to large national organisations, is noticeable as soon as visitors step into the school. The welcoming entrance, the tree-house classrooms, the horse-box coffee bar, the range of relevant work experience placements for pupils and the many other activities, such as the Dragon's Den event that pupils won against mainstream schools, show how well pupils are prepared for life beyond school.
- One inspector checked attendance, especially for pupils in receipt of additional funding, because data indicated that some pupils were absent too often. Many absences are linked to pupils' medical needs. Latest figures show that the attendance of pupils who are disadvantaged is better than that of their classmates. Good attendance is promoted well through specific rewards and celebrations.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- communication with a few parents and staff is improved so that the reasons behind key decisions are understood and responsibilities at all levels of leadership are clarified
- teachers and support staff provide even more opportunities to develop pupils' independence and meet their changing needs as they get older.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, the team inspector and I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and several subject leaders. I met members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to the school's improvement partner. You and the deputy headteacher joined us on visits to classrooms where we looked at pupils' work. We spoke with pupils and staff throughout the day. We observed pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I considered your own survey of pupils' views conducted in 2017 and responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View. I also took account of 21 text messages sent by parents. Forty staff completed the Ofsted's staff survey. I read the school's documentation, including the school's improvement plan, your own review of the school's effectiveness and information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.