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8 February 2016

Mrs J Warne
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Warne

Short inspection of Ellen Tinkham School

Following my visit to the school on 21 January 2016 with David Edwards, Her Majesty's 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 March 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school's vision is that, 'everyone will be the best they can be, nobody is excluded, every voice is heard'. This is embodied in every aspect of the school's work, every day. This applies to everyone; for example, six teaching assistants are working towards foundation degrees. Families and their children are empowered to have a real say about what support and help they want and need.

Since the last inspection, the school has federated with Bidwell Brook School in Totnes. You have used this to provide excellent opportunities for staff development and collaborative working, enhancing the quality of senior and middle leadership still further. Governors are highly skilled, dedicated and passionate about the work they do in the school. They work closely with the senior staff and other leaders in the school; they are highly effective in supporting the school and holding leaders to account. They have recently restructured the way they work to align more closely with the federated leadership teams.

You, the senior leaders and the governing body possess a very clear understanding and knowledge of each pupil's learning and progress. When pupils join the school, they are carefully assessed to see what they know, understand and can do. These baseline assessments are then used to set learning and development targets that

are personalised to each individual pupil. Great care is taken to set the targets with the full involvement of pupils and their families.

Pupils have targets that are set for them to work towards at home, as well as having work to be undertaken and completed at school. These can include everyday tasks such as doing the washing, making their bed and going shopping. These tasks help the pupils to be better prepared to live more independently when they leave school. With the strong parental support this helps provide an exceptionally resilient home-to-school relationship and work ethos, regardless of the personal challenges faced by the pupils. The result is that most pupils make good and outstanding progress in their learning. Pupils can practise their independent living skills at home, but they cannot practise them fully at school. You have plans to remedy this, when a suitable building is available.

Following the previous inspection you, other leaders and teachers felt that the electronic system and assessment process the school had been using to measure pupils' progress was not providing teaching staff with the information they required. You have therefore developed your own system, which is providing much fuller information. Teachers are using this information well to help plan the next steps in pupils' learning and to adjust activities if progress slows. As a result, pupils' progress continues to improve year on year.

Well before the introduction of statutory education, health and care plans, the school had been ensuring that pupils had a strong voice about their own needs, interests and desires. The school's system of person-centred learning, pupils 'listen to me' records, school council, family-centred reviews of pupils' progress and class and individual advocates are all aspects of the school's provision which continue to ensure that pupils' voices are clearly heard and listened to. Pupils told me about the changes that they suggested and, where appropriate, the school has made them. They also told me about the 'Rescue Crew', where elected pupils help each other out, for example when they are upset, angry or want a playmate. Pupils told me, as you already know, that they really appreciate the opportunity to take on such responsibilities, beaming with pride when wearing their responsibility sash and helping others.

Although staff use the current buildings creatively and exceptionally well, space is rather cramped. Due to the pupils' special educational needs, there is a lot of equipment that needs to be used from time to time and throughout the day. You are well aware that when this equipment is not needed, it fills the corridors as the school is very short of alternative storage.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school works extremely closely with other agencies and services to ensure the safety of those in its care, especially around the intimate care of pupils.

All of the school's safeguarding documents, records, processes and procedures are fit for purpose and successfully implemented. Pupils are effectively taught how to keep themselves safe.

A safeguarding 'hub', which includes members of the governing body, meets every half term to review and update any aspects relating to safeguarding. This ensures that safeguarding practice is carefully monitored and is seen as the responsibility of everyone.

Risk assessments are thorough. For individual pupils they include details about known triggers that might spark inappropriate behaviour by an individual, along with de-escalation strategies that can be successful. As part of the evidence for trips and activities they include input from parents, pupils and medical and academic histories, demonstrating how seriously the school takes pupil and staff safety.

Staff receive regular high-quality training, including for safety and safeguarding. Staff new to the school have this as part of their induction. Subsequent training, coaching and mentoring of staff ensures that their knowledge is kept up to date. Leaders have a clear understanding of their new duties, such as keeping pupils safe from the risks of radicalisation and child sexual exploitation, risks which they take very seriously.

Inspection findings

- Strong leadership, exemplified through well-established monitoring and assessment processes, ensures that the quality of teaching and learning continue to improve. The school also provides excellent support for other schools, which is highly sought-after, and enables pupils in other schools to have better learning experiences.
- It is alright to be different in this school. People's differences are celebrated and respected. Pupils are keen advocates for others to be happy to be different. For example, when a human character in a pantomime was bemoaning his donkey ears, pupils shouted out to him that his ears were beautiful and that he did not need to change them.
- Excellent outcomes for pupils of all ages are being maintained due to the high-quality learning experiences that pupils have. Those pupils who are entitled to the pupil premium are generally making even better progress than their classmates, closing previous gaps in their achievement.
- Pupils who have child protection plans have a dedicated staff advocate. Likewise, pupils who are in the care of the local authority are also monitored extremely closely to ensure they are kept safe and are making good and outstanding progress.
- Staff at the school are adept at using redirection when pupils display inappropriate behaviour. This approach is embedded across the school. Where physical interventions are needed, there is excellent aftercare and debriefing of pupils and adults.
- More pupils are reading. Some can read well, some can use their knowledge of letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) to decode

unfamiliar words, and others understand that symbols convey meaning. The increased number of pupils reading in Key Stage 2 clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of phonics teaching.

- This is a school that does not stand still. The development of the rural skills department on the school site enables pupils to develop skills in small animal husbandry, including how sheep and chickens grow, develop and are used in farming. These and the other animals, along with the roundhouse and allotment, are used extremely well by staff to engage pupils in real-life learning activities and to calm pupils when they get distressed.
- Moves between being a younger pupil to becoming a young person and an adult are clearly defined. Excellent support is provided for pupils and their families with close liaison with adult services and other providers. An innovative commitment is the 'transition learning budget', allocated to every pupil, which is used effectively to support pupils when they move into adult services.
- Ellen Tinkham's is not an isolated environment. In Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form (known as the Further Education department), all pupils who can, undertake some form of work experience or work-based learning. When they leave school all pupils are either in education, employment (including paid employment) or training.
- Pupils are encouraged to extend themselves academically to reach their potential, where appropriate taking functional skills tests in English and mathematics. Pupils who are able to do so, undertake GCSEs and are successful. However, there are not always suitable courses available near the school or pupils' homes where they can advance in their studies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the school continues to:

- extend the way it influences the provision of courses for pupils, post-16, available near to the school or their homes
- review the availability of school space, particularly for the storage of equipment, and realise the school's plans to provide a home-learning environment for pupils to use.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Devon County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you, other leaders, members of the governing body and parents. We spoke with pupils during lessons and scrutinised the quality of their work. I met with the school council. My colleague attended the school 'tea dance' and talked with parents and pupils there. I also took account of the 23 responses to a staff survey, the recorded comments from 38 pupils and 11 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

A wide range of documentary evidence was considered, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information and the school's analysis of attendance, behaviour and leavers' destinations.