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27 November 2017

Miss Sheralee Webb
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Dear Miss Webb

Short inspection of Northgate School & Arts College

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with Andrew Hunter, 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 a No Formal Designation inspection in December 2014 following the school being judged to be outstanding in February 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The school is a vibrant and welcoming place where pupils are confident as a result of the excellent relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are at the centre of everything the school does on a daily basis. The curriculum is relevant and appropriate and this is supported by effective procedures to maintain the well-being of the pupils.

During a time of turbulence, due to changes in staffing, including in the leadership team, you have led and managed the school skilfully and have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership team have continued the drive towards providing a stimulating educational experience for pupils. This has enabled pupils to make excellent progress. Consequently, they achieve strong outcomes. The wide range of educational opportunities they experience prepares them well for life when they leave school.

You, the governors and other school leaders are ambitious for the school and have high expectations of pupils and staff. The school goes the extra mile to ensure the safety and well-being of the pupils both on site and when at home. Staff frequently support pupils and families to ensure that they are safe when not at school. The governing body is highly effective. Governors monitor the work of the school closely and are actively involved in supporting school events. The senior leadership team,

along with the governing body, has a clear strategic vision of where the school is going.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that staff are fully confident in the use of visual supports and prompts for pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder and those who have more severe learning difficulties. Leaders have ensured that staff have access to quality training, which has resulted in all pupils having access to visual timetables in their classroom. Communication symbols are well used to support pupils allowing them to access their learning. In the sixth form, students have access to visual prompts to help them access work experience activities successfully. Leaders have also ensured that the effective use of teaching assistants across the school ensures that all pupils actively engage in lessons because their needs are being met.

Leaders have continued to develop the curriculum across both of the school sites to ensure that it reflects the needs of the pupils and students. Particular emphasis has been placed in developing their life skills. Students' access to 'the Beehive', which is the part of the sixth-form centre, enables them to undertake work placements in the cafe and 'Sweet Bee' shop. This helps to develop their communication and social skills in real-life scenarios.

You have worked successfully with and supported leaders to develop their skills in leadership and management. Leaders at all levels are articulate and know the strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. The enthusiasm and determination of senior and middle leaders to provide pupils and students with the best possible education is tangible at all levels.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors ensure that a strong safeguarding ethos exists throughout the school. Safeguarding arrangements and records, including recruitment and induction procedures, are detailed, regularly checked and are fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant and have received up-to-date safeguarding training, including child protection, preventing radicalisation and extremism, and female genital mutilation. All staff, including those recently appointed, are fully aware of the actions to take if they have a concern about a pupil's well-being. An effective system for reporting concerns ensures that any concern raised by members of the school community is dealt with quickly and effectively.

You and your safeguarding team work closely with parents and local agencies when you have a concern about a pupil's welfare. You are relentless in ensuring that pupils receive the support they require. Dedicated members of staff are used to ensure effective communication between the school and parents. You ensure that staff receive regular updates regarding any safeguarding concerns about pupils. You also ensure that all staff fully understand their responsibility in keeping pupils safe including online safety.

Inspection findings

- Leaders are excellent role models. They work determinedly to improve the outcomes for all pupils within the school. The role of the middle leaders has also continued to develop since the last inspection. They are empowered to secure improvements in their areas of responsibility. This demonstrates increased leadership capacity across the school.
- Leaders continue to develop the curriculum to ensure that all pupils engage positively in learning regardless of their difficulties. Learning areas have been developed within classrooms to ensure that pupils receive the support they require to access their learning. The curriculum also includes opportunities for the pupils and students to develop their ability to keep themselves safe.
- Governors play an active role in monitoring across all areas of the school. They keep themselves well informed and will challenge leaders if required to do so. Governors and senior leaders have introduced a new website; however, during transition from the previous website, checks were not done quickly enough to ensure that all the relevant information was available for a short period during this time.
- Teacher assessment procedures have been developed to monitor progress made by pupils. However, this assessment is not always triangulated sharply against lesson observations, focused learning walks and work scrutiny.
- You have ensured that effective use is made of the pupil premium funding. There is no difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils. Both groups of pupils make excellent progress. The effective support that you have put in place includes access to speech and language therapists, additional music provision and support for pupils so they can talk to counsellors if they need to do so. This is helping them to broaden their skills and provide support for their personal development and well-being.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to enrichment activities including a breakfast club and after-school club. On the day of the inspection, a group of pupils were swimming and another group went to the cinema.
- The school shares its practice with a wide range of partners. For example, during the inspection a large delegation of education providers from Hong Kong were observing how the curriculum was delivered to a wide range of pupils in order to meet their learning needs.
- Effective monitoring procedures ensure that pupils' attendance is consistently higher than the national average for special schools. Exclusions are rare.
- Behaviour at the school is excellent. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. They have positive attitudes to learning and engage well in activities. Pupils help each other, are courteous and are happy to talk about their school.
- Pupils stated there is no bullying; however, very occasionally there is 'some bickering' which is sorted out quickly by the staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the checks on teacher assessment are sharper and are informed by lesson observation, learning walks, book scrutiny and moderation
- the new website is checked frequently to ensure that it continues to meet statutory requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Greenhough

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors looked at a range of documentation including: the school's own self-evaluation and plans for improvement; the school's evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning; school policies; the school's most recent data on the attainment and progress of pupils; information provided to families; information relating to the safeguarding of pupils; the school's most recent data relating to the attendance and punctuality of pupils and information relating to pupils' exclusions.

Inspectors observed learning in a variety of lessons across both school sites and including some joint observations with the head of school. When in class, and where appropriate, inspectors looked at pupils' current workbooks across a range of subjects.

Meetings were held with senior leaders and a range of middle leaders, a group of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5, and members of the governing body, teachers and teaching assistants. A telephone conversation also took place with a representative from the local authority.

The inspector considered the range of and quality of information provided on the school website.