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Mr Nick Dry
Headteacher
St Nicholas School
Reedham Drive
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Dear Mr Dry

Short inspection of St Nicholas School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Mary Geddes, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your team are rightly proud of your school and say that it is a happy and supportive learning community. This was evident on the day of the inspection. The school provides its pupils with an education which matches as closely as possible that which they would receive in a mainstream school, while also meeting their individual needs effectively.

Since the last inspection, you have successfully worked on addressing the areas for improvement that were highlighted at that time. This includes developing a suitable assessment framework and improving the quality of teaching through better matching of tasks to pupils' abilities and improving their communication skills.

The behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons continues to be of the high standard reported in the last inspection. Attendance is good and exclusions rare. Pupils enjoy school and say that they have fun, are working hard and are having a good education. They also say that the teachers are kind.

Staff reported the leadership of the school to be very supportive and encouraging in developing their skills and expertise. They say that they are proud to work at the school and that there is a good community spirit.

You have an accurate grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development. You have recognised the need to extend your leadership team, and have already taken steps to do so, in the light of the proposed expansion of the school. The governing body, however, does not have all the required skills and knowledge to hold leaders to account for their work and provide support through this time of rapid change.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have ensured that staff are confident in reporting any safeguarding concerns they may have about pupils. They have a thorough knowledge of the relevant policies and procedures. They know pupils well and are alert to any changes in their behaviour that may provide a cause for concern.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school and are well informed about ways in which to keep themselves safe. They can give examples of keeping safe when using computers, for example recognising the dangers of strangers attempting to befriend them online. Pupils are confident to speak to staff about any concerns they may have and know that this is what they should do if they are unhappy about anything. Incidents of bullying are rare. When any incidents do occur, they are recorded effectively and followed up by leaders.

The designated safeguarding lead has the appropriate training and expertise for her role and this is respected by staff. Leaders are confident in communicating safeguarding concerns to the appropriate agencies outside school and, if necessary, in challenging their decisions. Attendance is good and checked regularly. There have been no recent exclusions.

All staff receive appropriate training in all aspects of safeguarding, including female genital mutilation, radicalisation and the 'Prevent' duty, child sexual exploitation and e-safety. The single central record is fully compliant. The school's recruitment procedures are very secure and emphasise the importance of safeguarding at all stages of the process.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to look at the improvements that leaders have made to assessment and the measurement of pupils' progress over time. You and your staff demonstrated how the new assessment frameworks are being used within the school. During learning walks, we viewed each teacher's assessment folder and saw evidence that the new system is being effectively implemented.
- Pupils placed at the school are assessed during their first half term. This provides teachers with accurate information about what they can and cannot do. Teachers check their assessments of pupils' skills with other teachers both within the school and externally with other schools.

- The assessment coordinator has worked with other school leaders in the local authority to develop 'bridging levels' designed to cover any gaps between P levels and the national curriculum. This has helped to assess pupils' skills more precisely.
- Leaders have developed pupil passports to show targets from pupils' individual education, health and care plans. These are being used as a basis for reviewing progress with parents and carers. Useful folders providing evidence of pupils' progress are currently used in Reception. These contain samples of work, photographs of achievements and additional assessment information such as attitudes to learning and social and emotional development.
- The new assessment systems are still at a relatively early stage of implementation. Currently, it is not possible to see how much progress pupils are making using these new systems because they have not been in place for long enough. Leaders have not established what good progress looks like for the different cohorts of pupils within the school.
- We agreed also to look at how leaders have improved teaching over time. In lessons we observed pupils clearly enjoying their learning. In one lesson, pupils were learning how to distinguish between helpful and harmful drugs and medicines. They were able to demonstrate their knowledge of safe and unsafe substances and to state that 'all medicines are drugs but not all drugs are medicines'. Pupils then moved to different areas to complete tasks that were well chosen to meet their needs. In another lesson, pupils were practising their counting skills. One pupil was very eager to use the interactive board to write a sum and another pupil was proud to complete it correctly. In a lesson about rationing in the war, pupils were encouraged to complete well-matched tasks with different levels of adult support. Some strong examples were seen of tasks being matched to pupils' abilities; however, this was not consistent across all lessons that were visited.
- In a communication lesson, pupils enthusiastically explained the 'headband game' and that the person wearing the headband has to guess the picture that is stuck to the band through asking questions. Communication lessons have been introduced for pupils grouped by similar communication needs and led by teachers or teaching assistants. These sessions are well planned and checked regularly by leaders. Different pupil groups may have a particular identified strategy to use, such as signing or symbols. The communication coordinator and speech and language therapists provide staff training and progress is recorded on charts for each pupil. Pupils were well engaged in these sessions that they clearly enjoy.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work clearly shows good and better progress in writing over time. Improvements in spelling also demonstrate good progress. The accelerated reading programme was seen also to have had a positive impact on pupils' progress. Overall, books and records show that all groups of pupils make good progress over time in a range of subjects.
- The governing body is over-reliant on the strength of school leaders to secure improvements. You have recognised this and arranged an external review of governance to make sure that the school is well supported. The governing body

is extremely dedicated and supportive of the school. Governors give a generous amount of their time in visiting the school and have enormous praise for the work that the staff do. The governing body is not, however, fully aware of the documents required to be published on the school website, including the pupil premium strategy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the breadth and depth of leadership and management, including governance, is extended so that leaders at all levels are supported and challenged in their work so that teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes improve further
- the new assessment frameworks are fully embedded to enable pupils' progress to be measured accurately over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Tarrant
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection team met with you and your deputy headteacher who was also the designated safeguarding lead, the assessment coordinator, the communication coordinator, teachers and teaching assistants. They also met with the school business manager to sample staff files and review the school's single central record. They met with the school's link improvement adviser from the local authority and with members of the governing body, including the chair and a parent governor.

Inspectors visited classes across the school, accompanied by yourself and your deputy, to gather a range of evidence relating to teaching, learning and assessment. They met with pupils to talk about their experience of school and aspects of safeguarding. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, subject improvement plans, assessment records, individual pupil plans and work in books. Inspectors took account of the 36 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were four responses to Parent View and no responses to the pupil questionnaire.