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Ms Merja Paakkonen
Interim Executive Headteacher
Meadow Wood School
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Dear Ms Paakkonen

Short inspection of Meadow Wood School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017 with Tania Perry, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about your strong and inspiring leadership. In a short space of time, with the excellent support of the interim deputy headteacher, you have lifted the staff's spirit and given them a clear vision for the future of the school. You ensure that teachers and pupils do their very best and strive to do even better. The swift, yet sensitive, way in which you engendered this collective team effort is a remarkable success in the light of the many staff changes, including that of the headteacher in the autumn term 2016. With the support of other leaders and governors, any slippage in pupils' outcomes, safety and welfare was avoided.

The interim deputy headteacher leads this special school expertly when you are not on site as you are also leading your own school. She is an excellent role model. Staff value her dedication and say that she is always available if they need support. They feel confident to share any ideas or concerns. Staff new to their role are pleased with the quality of the support they are getting. The interim leadership is effective because everyone is clear about what needs to be done. You quickly identified key priorities, tackled those that required urgent attention and drafted a clear plan of action for further developments. It is too soon to see the full impact of some of your strategies. In some areas, such as the precise monitoring of teaching, the management of staff performance and the quality of some safeguarding records, you have had insufficient time to embed effective practice fully.

Staff's knowledge of the specific medical, physical and neurological needs of pupils is strong. The individual pupils' profiles give a precise summary of needs and are used well to ensure that pupils make good progress and that these needs are met.

Governors are managing and planning the strategic future of the school effectively. The recently agreed arrangements for the federation of Meadow Wood with your own outstanding special school, Breakspeare School, are well managed. Parents and staff are kept informed through frequent and detailed updates. Knowledgeable governors are readily available to provide further information.

Parents have many opportunities to join in the school's work. The communication books are used well to record pupils' achievements, and parents use these to share their children's progress and new experiences at home. One parent said that the recent introduction of email communication was 'fantastic'. The ways in which the school celebrates pupils' successes contribute to their learning and sense of pride.

Teachers plan the work well in line with the school's three-level curriculum (pre-formal, semi-formal and more formal). The learning intentions generally match pupils' needs. However, during our joint observations, we found that work for the most able pupils is not challenging enough. Staff help pupils to express their feelings and to react when faced by experiences they may encounter in their daily life. For example, some pupils were carefully placing, and counting as they did so, small Easter eggs to decorate their cornflake chocolate cakes. They then tasted what they had made. They were having such fun; one pupil exclaimed, 'You had a good lick of that one!' as another pupil gleefully savoured the chocolate on the serving spoon. Another group were learning how to coordinate their hand movement and concentrated hard on holding a paintbrush as they studied the colour purple. These practical experiences develop pupils' agility and motor skills.

Staff develop pupils' independence and their sense of wonder for the world that surrounds them through indoor and outdoor activities such as swimming, trips and cultural experiences. As a result, the progress pupils make is good from their varied starting points. Assessment systems are being refined because assessment is not used well enough to record the precise small steps of progress that pupils achieve as they develop new skills. This is necessary to accelerate the progress of the most able pupils. The use of specific medical and learning resources is frequently reviewed. This is one aspect of provision that leaders have identified as requiring constant updates to keep up with new communication devices and specialist technology.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The leadership team ensures that they are fit for purpose. All safeguarding-related policies and procedures are in place and meticulously followed. Leaders and governors ensure that the relevant checks are made when employing new staff.

The interim deputy headteacher is tenacious in her work to ensure that various agencies support pupils well. Staff act as determined advocates for the pupils they

teach and look after, ensuring that pupils' views are heard and that decisions made are in their best interests. For example, the 'all about me' section of a case study that the interim deputy headteacher and I looked at showed that the wishes of the pupil and the family were recorded well and taken into account. As soon as she took up post in January 2017, the interim deputy headteacher set about improving the filing and recording system. Any missing information in pupils' records, including in the education, health and care plans, is being promptly gathered.

Staff keep pupils safe and are thoughtful about their needs and difficulties. Staff say that they are confident to raise any concerns that might arise and that senior leaders will be quick to respond. Staff are helping pupils sensitively to manage their physical and emotional impairment. They use skilful techniques to encourage all pupils to persevere, regardless of the severity of their physical needs.

Staff know how outings need to be assessed for the risk they may pose. The medical staff are meticulous in how they maintain records and administer medication to pupils. Learning support assistants expertly assess risks and manage pupils' medical conditions well so that it does not interfere unduly with their learning.

Inspection findings

- In addition to checking the effectiveness of safeguarding, at our first meeting we identified three specific areas of focus for this inspection.
- I wanted to check pupils' attendance. The school's overall attendance is only low because of the severe medical needs of pupils, with some having to travel a long distance to specialist clinics and hospitals. The excellent attendance of some pupils is admirable considering their physical and neurological difficulties. The interim deputy headteacher manages attendance effectively and is aware of the links that might potentially exist between poor attendance and safeguarding.
- We also wanted to look at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You use the outstanding practice of your own school to provide guidance and training for staff. As a result, teachers are helping pupils to make good progress against their individual starting points. Staff are particularly skilled at developing pupils' communication skills through touching, eye pointing and playing. They have created a calm and respectful learning environment. We found that work for the most able pupils is not demanding enough and leads to some underachievement.
- The curriculum and assessment processes are developing well. Senior leaders and the member of staff in charge of assessment lead this work enthusiastically. The assessment systems enable staff to monitor pupils' progress in their life, social, physical and communication skills. A professional team, composed of the class teacher, the physiotherapist, the occupational therapist and the speech and language therapist, meets termly to review each pupil's progress. This work shows that some pupils should move more rapidly from the semi-formal to the formal curriculum.
- The curriculum is rich and there are many opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in a safe and bright environment. This includes an exciting outdoor space,

access to a pleasant horticultural area, a well-kept swimming pool, a farm day organised in school, cultural events and various trips. In some lessons, pupils were observed applying their numeracy and physical skills well, such as in physical education where they were counting and pulling colourful scarves from a washing line.

- Our third area of focus was to check the quality of leadership, management and governance. We found that governors are holding the school to account and managing the development of the federation of Meadow Wood School with Breakspeare School sensitively and expertly. They are seeking to secure the future of this small school so that it continues to offer good care for pupils. The interim leadership arrangements are effective. You have a clear plan of action to monitor the quality of teaching across the school. With the support of the interim deputy headteacher, you know exactly how to support staff, including those who are not yet qualified. You are also careful not to make too many changes too quickly. You told me that you wanted 'the right people at the right place' and you are certainly succeeding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment processes are used more precisely to identify the skills that pupils have already acquired and adapt the learning intentions accordingly
- work for the most able pupils is sufficiently demanding to accelerate their rate of progress.

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 interim deputy headteacher and a range of other staff. We met with several members of the governing body, including the chair. We also spoke to a representative from the local authority. We visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work. We spoke with pupils and staff throughout the day. We observed pupils in lessons and in their outdoor activities. We took account of two text messages sent by parents. Only eight parents completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and a summary

analysis is therefore not available. Eight staff completed the staff questionnaire. We read the school documentation, including information related to safeguarding and progress.