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Mrs Lyn Dance
Headteacher
The Milestone School
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Dear Mrs Dance

Short inspection of The Milestone School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 2017 with Ofsted inspectors Tracy French, Hester Millsop and Andrew Penman, 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 September 2013.

The Milestone School continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. At that time, it was recommended that you develop the facilities and accommodation for younger pupils with increasingly complex needs as they move into the upper part of the school to ensure they remain first-class. This you have successfully achieved, which significantly impacts on the high-quality facilities afforded to pupils. These facilities include the welcoming space from which older pupils run their community café; the extension you have named 'The Haven' where pupils who find learning challenging have a bespoke learning environment; and the establishment of a well-being room, a safe haven for pupils with highly complex needs where they can now access a wide range of therapies. The actions you have taken have had a significant and impressive impact on pupils' experiences at the school, resulting in improved behaviour and engagement in their learning.

Through your outstanding leadership, the extremely high quality of care and education for pupils has been sustained. You are supported well by other senior leaders and governors. Your inspirational leadership, noted in the last inspection report, is evident from the range of ways you constantly endeavour to make your school even better. For example, you are currently striving to modify your curriculum to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of pupils. You have effective plans in place but are fully aware there is further work to be undertaken to embed the changes you are making to the curriculum to ensure pupils continue to make strong academic and personal progress.

Since the last inspection you have successfully gained teaching school status, establishing a teaching school alliance with Coney Hill Primary School. This provides increased training opportunities for staff in specialist areas, which further strengthens their practice.

Governance is strong. Governors are highly skilled and passionate about the work they do for the school. Since the last inspection, they have improved systems to challenge and effectively hold school leaders to account. Development plans for further improvement carefully reflect leaders' accurate evaluation of the school's performance. However, these plans do not consistently demonstrate precisely how actions taken are going to improve pupil progress.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All of those parents who responded to the online survey or spoke with inspectors stated that the pupils are extremely well looked after, are taught well and behave well, and that they receive valuable information about their child's progress. All also agree that the school is well led and managed. Parents welcome the high levels of communication between school and home. They see themselves as 'part of the team' working to support their children. They speak very highly of the quality of teaching and the support provided by teaching assistants. Comments such as 'they really care about the children and put a lot of time into them', 'the teachers and teaching assistants are amazing, I can't thank them enough' and 'my child has made amazing progress thanks to the time, energy and dedication of the staff team' are typical of the responses received.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures pupils are safe; the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring pupils continue to receive an outstanding standard of education; how teaching promotes good learning; the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting pupils' academic and personal development; and how you prepare pupils for their future destinations. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, other leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

The nature of your school means that all of the pupils who attend are vulnerable. You instil in your staff how safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone, irrespective of their role. Your mantra, 'if in doubt, shout', ensures that staff remain vigilant at all times. Indeed, you and your staff place pupils' safety at the heart of the school's work. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect each pupil from every possible risk. Staff receive high-quality training and receive the very latest guidance on all aspects of keeping children safe. This ensures they understand and are able to carry out their roles and responsibilities assiduously and with confidence. Furthermore, leaders work closely with a range of other external agencies to reduce risk to pupils and keep them safe.

Risk assessments are completed for a wide range of activities and for individual pupils where required. Leaders carefully check these assessments to ensure they remain fit for purpose in keeping pupils safe.

The school's systems to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils meet requirements. Leaders and governors understand the importance of safer recruitment. This ensures that all staff are carefully vetted prior to starting employment, to verify that they are suitable to work with children.

Pupils are exceptionally well supervised at the start and end of each day. Handovers between parents and escorts to staff are carefully planned. Information is shared at these times, keeping pupils safe.

Staff cultivate tremendously positive and trusting relationships with pupils. Consequently, pupils spoken to during the inspection reported that they are happy and feel extremely safe in school. They know they are able to share any concerns or worries with a member of staff and they will be quickly sorted out.

Parents and carers are extremely confident that their children are kept safe and are exceptionally well looked after during their time in school. 'How great it is to be able to leave my son who has such significant needs in a school where he is safe', and 'I am very grateful that my child was able to join this wonderful school' are two of the many positive comments parents expressed during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- 'It is a pleasure to be part of The Milestone team', and 'I feel lucky to work at the school, it is a very special place' are examples of the many positive comments made by staff under your continuing outstanding and inspiring leadership. Staff describe how 'nothing is too much trouble' to ensure pupils receive the very best quality of care and education.
- Leaders, including governors, are highly ambitious for the school. Together, you are uncompromising in your determination to ensure the school continues to provide an outstanding education. You have extremely high expectations, which are shared by your highly skilled and committed staff.
- You and your senior leaders monitor the quality of provision with rigour, providing bespoke mentoring and coaching to staff combined with carefully considered and effective professional development. However, leaders, including governors, have a 'no nonsense' approach. They have no hesitation in taking rapid and decisive action if staff do not meet the very high expectations placed on them. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time is consistently good, with much that is outstanding.
- The school provides excellent support to other schools as part of its role in a teaching school alliance.
- All staff know each pupil exceptionally well. Careful attention is given to each individual pupil. Information is used effectively to plan bespoke learning activities

which meet their needs precisely. There is a strong focus on real-life skills as well as learning core skills in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, younger pupils were excited to show inspectors the range of writing activities they had completed, demonstrating their strong progress in sentence construction and vocabulary choices. Pupils were justifiably proud of their accomplishments.

- Pupils' progress is carefully tracked lesson by lesson. Staff have a detailed knowledge of what pupils know, can do and understand, and are adept at modifying plans to accurately meet the needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils make consistently strong progress. There is no difference in the achievement and progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school.
- The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and learning experiences for pupils. Total communication is prevalent; a 'golden thread' that is evident across all subjects and in all year groups. This allows pupils to successfully access their learning. Pupils, often from extremely low starting points, develop a love of learning which is reflected in their regular attendance.
- Pupils have access to a wide range of additional experiences. For example, pupils were keen to show inspectors an episode from the 'Milestone TV'. Pupils make a weekly television programme linked to their learning, such as on internet safety, bullying and friendship. Consequently, this supports pupils in raising their self-esteem and prepares them well for their future. Horse riding, choir, swimming and art are just a few of the many activities in which pupils are active participants. The school is understandably proud of the many accomplishments of pupils in these activities, which include performances in Gloucester Cathedral singing and performing on the Taiko drums.
- As a result of the outstanding provision of this school, all pupils move on successfully to further education, training or employment. Pupils and their parents receive high-quality guidance and support to ensure that their next steps are appropriate. Parents are highly complimentary of the time and determination of staff to support them and their children when they need to consider their future destinations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- development plans indicate precisely how actions taken have improved the achievement and progress of pupils and who will make these checks
- the school's proposed curriculum is fully implemented across the school to enable pupils to continue to make strong progress in their academic and personal development.

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your senior leaders. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. We observed the start of the day when pupils first arrive in school. We carried out a 'learning walk' through classes, accompanied by you or your senior leaders. We also held discussions with four governors, and held meetings with other members of staff. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority. We talked to a group of pupils to gather their views. We took into consideration the responses of 26 questionnaires completed by staff.

We looked at a wide range of documentation. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plan, and information relating to pupils' achievement and progress. Records relating to behaviour and safeguarding were also carefully checked.

We spoke to a group of parents and took into account other correspondence received during the inspection. We considered the eight responses to Ofsted's online survey, 'Parent View', and eight free-text messages were also taken into account.