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Dear Mrs Calow

Short inspection of Granta School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Vicky Parsey, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good

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

Many things make Granta School a good school. It is a safe and welcoming place where pupils and students in the sixth form learn well. The environment is calm because staff expertly manage pupils' behaviour. Pupils are proud of their school and are well supported to express their own views. In classes, and at a meeting with the school's council, pupils were confident in telling the inspectors why they are happy at school. Their comments included 'I love my school', 'I like my teacher', 'Teachers really help us', 'This school has helped me to feel confident in my learning' and 'This school helps me with what I want to do when I leave school.'

Parents are also very positive about the school. They say that you are 'an impressive leader' and that staff know how to meet the specific needs of their children. Parents value the way the school helps them to learn how to support their children at home and how to manage their children's emotional and behavioural needs. Parents like the creative curriculum and the effective communication through the daily diaries.

The findings from this inspection confirm the positive views of parents, pupils and students. There are many opportunities for parents to join in the school's activities, for example through the Saturday workshops, the cooking clubs and whole-school

events. You are determined to do the very best for each pupil in your care. You are resilient and do not shy away from taking challenging decisions to improve pupils' welfare and outcomes. You provide staff with clear direction to achieve your high expectations.

With the excellent support of your deputy headteacher, you evaluate what you do well and what you could do even better to ensure the best provision for staff and pupils. Particular strengths include: the way staff help pupils to settle when they join the school mid-year; the effective transition when pupils move across key stages; the good preparation of older students for adulthood; the quality and positive impact of training on staff; and your useful partnership with teacher-training institutions to offer placements to trainee teachers.

The school is facing some changes to its senior leadership and responsibilities are not yet entirely clear across the management team. Newly appointed senior leaders know the school well but their capacity to sustain effective provision is unproven. Governors bring a range of expertise to the school. They use their knowledge of the school well to hold leaders to account and review school priorities.

Staff are highly committed. They apply their training well to manage pupils' behaviour and develop their skills. The practical learning activities, such as in food technology, are relevant and well organised. These develop pupils' coordination and motor skills and make learning real and fun. The use of technology such as iPads helps pupils to make real choices and express their feelings and opinions. Staff work well together to ensure that the needs of individual pupils are taken into account when planning these tasks. However, the application of the school's assessment processes, which aim to build upon pupils' small steps of progress, is inconsistent. The way teaching assistants check and record pupils' achievement is, at times, too informal. The best practice that exists in the school is not yet shared well enough across all key stages.

Key stage leaders monitor the quality of teaching and standards carefully. They ensure that staff use a range of resources to develop pupils' independence and to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. This is done well with older pupils at key stages 3 and 4 and with students in the sixth form, often because the examinations and Duke of Edinburgh's awards provide precise contexts and targets to reinforce these essential skills. At key stage 2, the use of the learning environment and curriculum time is not sufficiently maximised to develop pupils' skills or to celebrate pupils' academic and personal successes.

The school offers a rich curriculum. A range of educational opportunities broaden pupils' experiences and their understanding of the wider world. In-school events, such as science days, and visits to places of social or cultural interest help pupils to apply what they have learned at school. Partnerships with other special schools and local colleges are strong. The positive links with Linton Village College are benefiting pupils in many ways. For example, those who are keen or most-able can access a designated space to play football on the college's grounds. The work experience placements are well organised and time spent at local colleges is highly beneficial to

older students, who feel confident about moving on to new provision when they leave Granta School.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. The single central record is kept up to date and all necessary checks are made when appointing staff. The school's business manager is well organised and meticulous. The local authority provides good support and responds promptly to any queries. Frequent briefings keep staff well informed of pupils' medical needs.

You are the designated safeguarding lead and are currently considering reallocating this role to a member of the senior team as part of a review of leadership responsibilities. This is being carefully considered and training is being planned to ensure that it is done safely. With the support of staff, you identify and monitor vulnerable pupils effectively.

Pupils are taught how to keep safe and how to tell an adult if they are worried about poor behaviour, such as bullying. The pupils who met with one inspector clearly said that 'if a person is unkind through their words or actions, we need to tell a teacher or the head.' The curriculum and the personal, social, health and citizenship programme help pupils understand and manage risks, such as learning about relationships, understanding what public and private spaces mean and keeping safe when using social media.

You are quick to follow up any concerns you may have about individual pupils, particularly when they move to another provision or another local authority. You work effectively with external agencies so that pupils get the services and support identified on their education, health and care plans as quickly as possible. You check pupils' attendance meticulously and identify where low attendance may give rise to a safeguarding concern. At age 19, the transfer of information from children's social care services to adult services is done carefully so that any relevant information about students' needs is not overlooked.

Inspection findings

- This inspection focused on three specific areas, in addition to checking the safeguarding culture of the school. First, we looked at teaching and learning and we checked where the training of staff made a difference to pupils' progress. We found that staff are skilled at using specific techniques to help pupils learn, such as signing, modelling and learning through movement and sound. Staff are applying good techniques to manage behaviour positively and sensitively. They use British sign language well, thus developing the capacity of pupils to communicate with staff and their peers. This is particularly successful post-16.
- Staff give much of their time and energy to improving their practice and learning new strategies. Specific initiatives, such as restorative justice, rebound and music

therapy, help staff reflect on the effectiveness of their work and contribute to pupils' excellent personal development.

- Teachers help pupils to learn new skills and to persevere with their work. Snack time is used very well to develop pupils' independence and to help them socialise with others in their class. Teachers know the requirements of the examinations and Duke of Edinburgh's awards. Consequently, older students are prepared well for adulthood and make good progress from their various starting points. Many gain a number of worthy qualifications in a range of subjects, as well as useful work-based skills.
- A second line of enquiry focused on assessment. The deputy headteacher leads this important work very effectively. Several initiatives, such as the skills ladders, the routes for learning, moderation exercises and pupils' progress meetings, provide leaders and governors with an accurate picture of progress and achievement over time. Starting points are well understood. In most groups, including for the youngest children in the early years, assessment is used well, following the school's policy, to accelerate pupils' progress. This effective practice requires some consolidation at key stage 2, where the recording of pupils' small steps of progress to move learning on is not sufficiently robust. There is scope to develop the role of teaching assistants in this area.
- For our third investigation, we checked the effectiveness of leadership and governance. You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection. Staff have improved their planning, they now make sure that pupils are listened to and they check how pupils are getting on with their work. Staff changes are leading to a review of key responsibilities. You acknowledge that, with your demanding role as designated safeguarding lead, further delegation is required. Current leaders, including key stage leaders, fulfil their duties very willingly and efficiently. However, newly appointed leaders will require support and guidance to meet your high expectations for pupils' personal development and good outcomes.
- As an experienced headteacher, your successes include careful checks on the impact of additional funding, excellent relationships with parents, positive teamwork and willingness to offer your school as a venue for the training of future teachers, especially to show them how fulfilling it can be to work in a special school such as Granta School. A large group of 27 trainee teachers provided an extremely positive evaluation of the training they received at your school.
- Governors are highly knowledgeable and bring a wealth of expertise to the school. They visit classes frequently and use a wide range of performance information to hold the school to account. They are aware of current financial constraints and are carefully managing the school's budget. The chair of the governing body is relentless in her commitment to improving the governance of the school. Governors are keen to attend training events. They fulfil their responsibilities concerning safeguarding and safer recruitment very well. They keep close contact with the whole school community.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the allocation of responsibilities among senior leaders is clarified in the light of forthcoming staff changes
- the use of the learning environment and curriculum time is maximised at key stage 2 to improve pupils' skills further and to celebrate their achievements
- the effective assessment practice that exists in the school is applied consistently across all groups to accelerate pupils' 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 Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, governors and various groups of pupils. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to classes, and most of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's senior management team. One inspector had a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including policies, the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, safeguarding records and information about pupils' achievement and behaviour. We considered the views expressed in 18 questionnaires completed by the staff and 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, together with ten additional comments from parents. One pupil completed the Ofsted survey and some pupils wrote to the inspectors with the support of staff. Inspectors also looked at the school's own parental surveys.