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Mr Nathan Aspinall
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Dear Mr Aspinall

Short inspection of Portesbery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2017 with Jo Yates, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your position earlier this year, you have quickly established your authority and generated a new energy at Portesbery. Parents are particularly positive about the way you lead the school. Relationships between staff at all levels are very supportive. Teaching and support staff, including the nursing and therapist team, are dedicated and knowledgeable. Under the joint guidance of you and your capable leadership team, the school is moving forward at a rapid pace.

Classroom visits were particularly useful in demonstrating to me how pupils are supported to engage in learning. Staff know pupils well. Teachers plan learning that is relevant and individualised to each pupil's needs. This is the case across all phases of the school, including in the early years and sixth form. Support staff are used effectively. They understand the importance of offering the right balance of assistance to pupils, while encouraging them to become as independent as possible.

Pupils are enthusiastic learners because the curriculum engages and excites them. My visits to classrooms in the secondary phase were punctuated by episodes of great fun and many smiles. One class enjoyed becoming characters from the film 'Star Wars' as part of their communication story session. One group of students in the sixth form delighted in making Christmas decorations, while others enjoyed serving parents coffee and cake in the sixth-form common room.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school. These included pupils achieving well, the good quality of teaching, and the good care and integrated therapies available to pupils. They also identified the need for teachers to plan more consistently for the needs of pupils of all abilities, as well as giving pupils time to respond to questions and to make their own choices during lessons. They also highlighted the need for staff to be more effective in interpreting the impact of interventions to improve pupils' behaviour. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. Classroom practice is strong. Expectations are high, and learning is pitched at the right level for pupils of all abilities. Questioning is a particular strength, especially when some pupils' restricted communication skills are taken into account. Leaders and staff have improved the way they monitor behaviour, and use their tracking system effectively to help improve the way pupils engage in learning.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the process of self-evaluation. Since your arrival, you have quickly come to terms with the school's many strengths. You have also identified some key priorities for improvement. These include enhancing the curriculum by utilising the outdoor environment more and improving the way pupils use the lunch break to enrich their learning further. We agreed that your systems to track pupils' progress would benefit from additional refinement to enable them to become as useful as possible to leaders and staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Levels of care and support for pupils and staff alike are very high. Policies and procedures are sound. Importantly, safeguarding has a high profile, including for governors, who understand their responsibilities to ensure that the school is a safe environment.

Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard children. Their safeguarding training is up to date and comprehensive. They know what to do if they have concerns and are not afraid to question leaders if they are unsure about systems or day-to-day routines. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire and pupils who talked to inspectors were positive about the levels of care and support available in the school.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum suits the needs of pupils well. It is extremely personalised and enriched by the daily use of specialist facilities, including the trampoline hall, hydrotherapy pool and sensory room. Pupils also enjoy activities such as horse riding and visits into the local community to shops and cafes, which help them to develop their interpersonal skills. English and mathematics are taught discretely, as well as through topics and themes, across all phases of the school. Leaders have plans to enrich the curriculum further by developing the school's extensive outdoor environment. They also recognise that lunch breaks could be better utilised to maximise and enrich the learning experiences of pupils.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education or training

and for life after Portesbery. Most pupils are making good or better progress from their different starting points. Progress is assessed in a number of ways.

Academic progress is given a high degree of importance. However, other aspects, such as developing social skills and pupils' willingness to communicate and engage in learning, are an equally high priority. Recent changes in the school's systems to assess pupils' progress are being implemented consistently across the school. However, more time is required for changes to embed, and further refinement is needed to some aspects before systems become fully effective.

- Leaders understand that attendance is critical to the progress pupils make in their learning. Absence is monitored closely, and attendance records are accurate and maintained well. Concerns about attendance are dealt with sensitively by school leaders. Communication with parents and outside agencies is strong. As a result, most pupils attend school regularly, and absence is kept to a minimum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to monitor and assess pupils' progress are further refined, so that they become a fully effective tool for staff to track progress and plan next steps in learning
- the curriculum is further enriched by developing the outside learning environment and fully utilising opportunities to support pupils' learning during the lunch break.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited classrooms in all phases of the school, observing teaching and learning, and assessing the quality of pupils' work. They observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and as they moved around the school. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the chair of the governing body accompanied by three other governors, and with a group of pupils. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors took into account 51 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and the 22 accompanying free-text messages. A telephone call was also received from a parent during the inspection. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, policies, minutes of governing

body meetings and records of visits by the local authority.