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Mr Ed Francis
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Dear Mr Francis

Short inspection of Fort Royal School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 2016 with Rowena Green, 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 last inspection.

It is clear that following your appointment in January this year, you swiftly gained the confidence and respect of staff, governors and parents. You have recognised and built well on the existing strengths at Fort Royal, but have also brought a fresh pair of eyes. You quickly spotted where adjustments and improvements were needed and were open and honest in sharing your evaluations with other leaders and the governing body. Actions taken in the light of your evaluations have added to the school's momentum and boosted the pace of change. The school's ethos is positive and ambitious. Recent appointments to other key positions, such as the business manager and the chair of the governing body, have also made a discernible difference, bringing greater rigour and urgency to the school's drive for improvement.

Fort Royal is a warm and welcoming place. Classrooms are bright and well organised. Frequent use is made of the space outside the classrooms and the extensive grounds – pupils have waterproofs and wellies so that they are able to play and learn outside in wet weather. Each class includes pupils of different ages, abilities and needs. This means that pupils have the chance to interact with and support one another. Older pupils, once they have passed the wheelchair 'driving test', are allowed to help their classmates move around the school.

The school's last inspection report highlighted many positive aspects of the school's work. It referred to pupils' excellent behaviour and the attention that was paid to the welfare of individual pupils. It pointed out that, as a result of good teaching, many pupils made good progress, and some made progress that was outstanding. These strengths have been maintained. The report also included some aspects that required further attention. Work needed to be done to make sure that additional adults who support pupils' learning have the skills and knowledge needed to make sure that pupils made the best possible progress. In addition, teachers were asked to make sure that the work pupils were asked to do was demanding enough for them.

The assessment of pupils' learning and achievement in the wider curriculum and in their personal development is not as well established as that in English and mathematics. The school's approach to teaching the wider curriculum has recently been revised. Senior leaders decided to group subjects under broad headings similar to those used in the early years curriculum, and to set out what was to be taught and when, in a two-year rolling programme. They then collated 'I can' statements that are used to track how well pupils are progressing and to indicate next steps. A similar approach is being developed to inform the teaching and assessment of pupils' personal and social skills and well-being. The systems are, as yet, too recent to have yielded enough information to provide a clear picture of learning and progress in the wider curriculum, or to highlight where adjustments to teaching or the curriculum need to be made.

You and the leadership team have, on the whole, dealt with these areas for improvement successfully. Teachers and other adults carefully check and record what pupils have learned after every lesson. They then decide on the next steps that will take pupils' learning forward. Because teachers and other adults plan together, there is a good understanding of what pupils are aiming for in every task and activity. Individual pupils' targets for each lesson are clearly displayed on every table. This makes doubly sure that all adults know exactly what they should be doing and that pupils are appropriately challenged. Additional adults have benefited from training and professional development. You have also checked that all have the necessary skills and underpinning knowledge in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, there are still occasions when adults intervene too quickly and do not allow the pupils enough time to think, respond or to decide what to do for themselves.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has made sure that the school's policies and procedures for protecting children and keeping them safe are up to date and reflect current legislation as well as guidance from the local authority. Your designated safeguarding leader has already revised the school's policy in the light of very recent guidance, and has made sure that every member of staff has read the updated version of the government's publication 'Keeping children safe in education'. She keeps a careful record of who has received training and when. Currently, a rolling programme of training is taking place to make sure that staff understand all issues, including those such as peer-on-peer abuse. Your policy

rightly draws your staff team's attention to the fact that children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly vulnerable. Staff understand the need to be vigilant, especially when a child has difficulty in communicating his or her feelings.

Records of individual cases are comprehensive, detailed and well organised. Notes are made of what has happened and when, in chronological order. This helps give a clear overview and to highlight where there may be patterns. Any concerns that are raised by staff are dealt with quickly and referred to the local authority where appropriate. Your designated safeguarding leader says that the local authority's 'family front door' service is quick to respond and that working relationships are good. Nevertheless, you and your staff are tenacious in following up any cases where you judge that further work or a different approach is needed.

You work closely with the local authority and other agencies to help support pupils and their families. Other school policies, such as those for managing pupils' behaviour, safe handling, the provision of intimate care and position of trust, make sure that staff are in no doubt about what is expected of them.

Many pupils arrive by minibus at the start of the day and others are brought in cars by their parents. Your site managers supervise this process carefully to make sure that everyone is kept safe in the limited space. You take swift action to follow up when a pupil is absent without an explanation. You and your staff work closely with families to try to maximise attendance. For example, you used pupil premium funding to support one family with transport costs.

You and your governing body are determined to maintain a high level of priority on all aspects of safeguarding. When you arrived at the school, although every staff member had an enhanced up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service check, you found some irregularities on staff recruitment records. These have now been fully rectified. The school's arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff have now been tightened up. You and the governing body are determined that this lack of rigour will not happen again.

Inspection findings

- You and your staff are outward looking in your approach to improvement. You have many profitable links with other schools, both special schools and mainstream. You work well with a number of external partners, including the local authority, and are constantly seeking feedback on the school's performance to help you find ways of improving what you do. You and the staff are reflective practitioners, willing to learn from one another and from other schools. You also offer help and guidance to other schools, for example with planning and assessment for children in mainstream schools who have learning difficulties.
- The pupils' books and your assessment records show that many pupils make at least good progress in their learning in English and mathematics during their time at Fort Royal. You place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills in communication. Many learn to recognise signs and symbols that help them to understand what is expected of them and to make their needs known. The most

able pupils read fluently and with expression, although they may not fully understand what they are reading.

- Many parents who completed the online questionnaire praised the progress that they see their children making. Pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium are making as much progress as other pupils, taking into account their individual starting points.
- The early years forms a large part of the school's provision. The adults who work in the Nursery and the Reception classes provide supportive and warm environments which help children to settle quickly. Staff have good relationships with children and their families. There is an appropriate emphasis on promoting learning, as well as on caring for the children. Children are also encouraged to try to do things for themselves and to develop their independence and self-help skills. Even so, there are some occasions when adults do not allow children sufficient time to think and respond before they intervene.
- The early years leader is a knowledgeable practitioner and she has a good understanding of how to assess and track children's progress and development across the areas of learning. She has devised a system that shows the progress made by groups of children from their different starting points. It indicates that many children make swift progress and begin to catch up on what is typical for their age. Children's learning journey books show clearly the progress that they are making. Parents are encouraged to contribute to these records.
- The governing body commissioned a review of its effectiveness. It was carried out in March this year and governors are now working hard to deal with areas that were identified as needing attention. They acknowledge that, in the past, they accepted information they were given and did not probe sufficiently beneath the surface. They are working well to strengthen the part that they play in shaping the school's direction and in holding leaders to account for provision and outcomes. As a result, governance is improving strongly. Minutes of meetings indicate clearly that the level of challenge has increased. Governors were recently involved in the school's 'vision and values' day. They fully support the drive for further improvement, and understand what is being aimed for.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors and who completed questionnaires were full of praise for the work that the school does to promote their children's learning and welfare. In particular, they mentioned how well staff understand and respond to their children's individual needs. Many mentioned how happy their children are to come to Fort Royal.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information about pupils' progress across the wider curriculum and in their personal development and well-being is analysed to give a clear picture of how well they are achieving and where adjustments to teaching may need to be made
- work to develop further the skills and knowledge of additional adults continues, so that all adults, including those in the early years, fully understand the need to give pupils every opportunity, and the time, to think and respond.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

This inspection focused closely on the following key lines of enquiry:

- the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements
- provision and outcomes in the early years
- arrangements for assessing pupils' progress across the wider curriculum
- the impact of governance on the school's effectiveness
- the impact of the steps taken to deal with the areas for development identified at the school's previous inspection.

During this inspection, both inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, other leaders and members of staff. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. We spoke briefly with pupils in lessons, and one inspector met a small group of pupils to talk to them about their experiences of school. We visited classrooms to observe pupils and staff. I took account of the 16 responses to the online survey of the views of staff, and the 16 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. A small number of parents spoke to an inspector at the start of the day.

We looked at a range of documents including information about pupils' progress, policies and procedures for protecting children and keeping them safe, curriculum information, the school's self-evaluation and the plan for school improvement. I also looked at information on the school's website.