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Mrs Angela Drayton
Principal
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Dear Mrs Drayton

Short inspection of St Dominic's School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 2017 with Sue Bzikot, 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your leadership team promote high aspirations for pupils, which permeate through the school. You are passionate that pupils in your school succeed academically as well as socially and emotionally. You have encouraged a culture of positive communication, which enables staff to look after all aspects of pupils' learning and welfare very well. Staff feel valued for their work, and are rightly proud to be part of St Dominic's School. The vast majority of parents have confidence in the school, praising the positivity staff show and how well they adapt what they do to meet the needs of individual pupils. One said the school 'has been life-changing' for her son because of the supportive nature of the staff.

Pupils present as happy and conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. Most pupils who attend the school have experienced difficulties in mainstream education. Leaders have made sure that staff have a thorough understanding of each pupil's needs, which helps pupils to manage their behaviour increasingly well and to make good progress in their work. Pupils feel involved in the school and recognise that staff work hard to help them. Typical comments include 'They always listen', 'They always help', 'The staff are amazing' and 'This is the best school I've been in.'

Since the last inspection, you have improved still further several aspects of the school, including those identified as areas for improvement at the last inspection. For example, work to improve the teaching of mathematics has been particularly effective, and pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. There have been some changes to the overall leadership of the school. The school is no longer a faith school, and is currently part of a local trust of three schools called Radius. Orchard Hill College Academy Trust provides excellent support for you and your governors. You reflected that this trust has helped you to streamline systems and has offered expert advice which has been difficult to access in the past.

Governors have undertaken a review of their work. They have acted on the advice they received, so that they are now even more efficient and effective. Governors are regularly in contact with the school, attending events and talking to staff and pupils, which helps them know the school well. Leaders said they find governance appropriately supportive and challenging, and records of meetings confirm this.

You have made sure that your senior leadership team is very effective. By bringing the leadership of the care provision into the senior leadership team, you have ensured that communication between the education and care aspects of the school has improved. Together, leaders have a strong understanding of how the curriculum has to be constantly adapted to meet pupils' different and changing needs. This curriculum includes careful consideration of pupils' academic, social and therapy needs. Staff assess pupils' achievements in all these aspects regularly, tracking their development meticulously. This enables leaders to make sure that teaching and support for pupils are tailored to meet individual needs very well. Most teaching is highly effective and enables pupils to make very strong progress academically, socially and emotionally. Your plans to utilise best practice in the quality of teaching and care provision are well judged. So too are your plans to continue to develop the curriculum to include more access to performing arts and outdoor learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and welfare of pupils are central to your work and that of your staff. Pupils feel safe and very well cared for in school. They trust adults to help them with any concerns or difficulties they may have. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they know to tell an adult if they see anything online that worries them.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They make thorough checks when recruiting new staff. All staff are trained regularly in child protection procedures. Staff know the signs that may indicate that a child needs help, and speak confidently about how to report any concerns they may have. You have improved your processes for recording and monitoring such concerns. As a result, staff support pupils and their families effectively. Leaders work highly efficiently with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils who need it get extra support to stay safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, my focus areas were how effective is teaching in mathematics? How effectively have leaders improved attendance and behaviour, and reduced the number of exclusions? And how effectively are pupils prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training when they leave school?
- Since the last inspection, leaders have worked effectively to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics. Additional training for all staff to increase their knowledge of, and confidence in, teaching mathematics has worked. Teachers ask carefully thought-through questions to aid pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts and to encourage the use of mathematical terminology. New resources help pupils to explain their thinking as they solve mathematical problems. For example, pupils in Year 6 used coins to help them simplify fractions, telling the teacher clearly that they were looking for the 'denominator'. As a result of improved teaching, pupils make good progress in mathematics. Many pupils take national qualifications which help them to secure places in further education, employment or training.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly average and improving. You and your leaders have worked hard with pupils and their families to remove barriers for those pupils who experience difficulties attending school regularly. For example, you liaise well with external agencies to make sure that pupils who require emotional help receive it promptly. Similarly, you help families find tailored solutions for those pupils who experience difficulty making the daily transition between home and school.
- Your school is a calm, positive place. As part of the nature of their special educational needs, several pupils experience difficulties controlling their emotions and sometimes lose control of them. You and your leaders have been very successful at helping to minimise such incidents. The 'social and communication programme' you have devised is used consistently throughout the school to support pupils' development. Adults use positive language with pupils and offer them choices which help them to feel in control and calm. For example, adults encourage pupils to 'show support' when their classmates answer questions, and remind pupils to 'sit to learn'. In addition, a new electronic system for recording incidents of poor behaviour is helping leaders to track patterns and identify the triggers which cause some pupils to lose control. This allows you to provide pre-emptive support for these pupils, using the in-house therapists and external agencies very effectively. As a result of this work, you have substantially reduced the number of incidents which require pupils to be excluded from school. Pupils feel secure, safe and supported in school.
- You, your leaders and governors make sure that pupils are very well prepared for their next stages of education, employment or training. You tailor the curriculum each pupil follows so that it matches their abilities and aspirations well. Pupils are able to take qualifications, often in partnership with local colleges, such as in art, animal care and construction. You also make sure that, as part of the 'functional independence' curriculum, pupils are prepared for life as an adult, for example by ensuring that they know how to shop, cook and use

a cashpoint. You expertly track pupils' educational, social and emotional progress, refining the support you provide for individual pupils to help maximise their progress. All pupils are given the opportunity to experience work, for example in the local shop and café, which helps to develop their communication skills very well. You make sure that all pupils who leave St Dominic's take up further education, training or employment, often supporting them beyond their time in school to develop as good citizens in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop and adapt the curriculum and provision to meet the changing needs and aspirations of pupils, including providing more opportunities for performing arts and for pupils to learn outdoors
- remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and care are minimised by sharing best practice in school and with local partners.

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

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, senior leaders, other staff, governors, pupils and a representative of Orchard Hill College Academy Trust. Inspectors observed 13 lessons across all key stages, all with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a range of pupils' work. Inspectors considered the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as confidential survey responses from 67 staff. Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including governors' minutes and safeguarding information.