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Dear Mrs Leonard

Short inspection of The Chiltern School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Sharon Wilson, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

In a short space of time, as the school's new headteacher, you have sensitively galvanised the whole school into action. The clear direction you give to the senior leadership team is having a very positive impact on improving provision.

Collectively, staff work well together across the two sites of the school. Senior and middle leaders are highly competent and confident leaders. You have clarified their roles and responsibilities very effectively. The capacity created as a result of this transformation is already improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Staff who completed the online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about your leadership. Several teachers, new to the school, praised senior leaders for the high quality of their training and induction and for their ongoing support.

The school is a happy place where pupils enjoy learning and make good progress. Classroom visits showed that staff are addressing the factors needed to mitigate pupils' barriers to learning. As a result, pupils engage readily with staff and show good attitudes towards coming to school. Despite their complex needs, pupils were keen to share their work with the inspectors. The members of the school's council, who met with one inspector, said that the school was 'great' and 'interesting'. They also demonstrated that they cared for one another. One pupil said 'the school is

accepting of me' and another explained how good it was to help those who struggled.

The majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, or who wrote to me share this positive view of the school. One parent wrote: 'We feel the new headteacher has a clear and accurate understanding of how to move the school forward.' This view was borne out when I met with you and senior leaders at the start of the inspection. As a team, you identify very clearly the school's strengths and where further improvement is required.

At the time of the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school, including the effective leadership and governance, the pupils' good progress in reading, writing and counting and their positive attitudes to learning. They also identified the need to speed up the rate of pupils' progress in key stages 3 and 4 and improve the quality of teaching and learning in these year groups. Leaders addressed these matters successfully and classroom visits showed that teaching and support staff work effectively together to promote good learning.

The school's curriculum offers an exciting range of opportunities, on-site and off-site, to develop pupils' confidence and independence. However, the range of pupils' needs and abilities are changing. Consequently, you acknowledge that the current curriculum does not meet the needs of the most able pupils fully and that access to relevant accreditations at key stage 4 and post-16 is lacking. Communication aids and modern technology are not used well enough to enable some pupils, especially those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, to have even better access to the curriculum.

At the time of the previous inspection, governance was judged to be very effective. Governors are highly knowledgeable. They continue to support the school well. Minutes of their meetings show that they hold the school to account. This inspection identified a number of policies on the school's website that require some updating.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Staff and governors take their collective responsibility to keep pupils safe very seriously. The school's recruitment checks for the suitability of staff are compliant with current requirements.

All staff have undergone training. They have received and read the latest guidance and demonstrated a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. They know exactly what to do should they have a concern about a pupil. Records kept by the school of children who are at risk of abuse or neglect, or who are identified as being vulnerable, are very well maintained. They are kept securely and show how the school works effectively with external agencies and services to support families in need of additional help.

The school's culture to protect children and keep staff and pupils safe is well developed. Procedures to ensure pupils' safety on educational outings and visits in

the community are strong. Risk assessments are robust. Staff ensure that pupils are supervised at all times. With the designated safeguarding lead, you are monitoring the reasons for the poor attendance of some pupils to ensure that they are safeguarded. The school's overall attendance is below average and, for some pupils, it is far too low. You need to work more closely with families to reduce the persistent absence of some pupils.

Pupils told the inspectors that they feel safe and that teachers help them to behave well. A few parents who completed the Ofsted questionnaire are worried about bullying. Some feel that staff are not good at managing challenging behaviour. Incidents are rare and well investigated. Inspectors saw that staff were applying the school's procedures effectively to reassure pupils and meet their emotional needs. You are eager to develop even better communication with families to address their concerns.

Inspection findings

- In addition to checking the effectiveness of safeguarding, at our first meeting we identified several areas of focus for this inspection. To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my lines of enquiry was to check whether the changes in the senior leadership team, and some changes to staffing, had slowed improvement. I also looked at how, with the support of other leaders, you were developing the curriculum to meet pupils' needs.
- There is much evidence to show that the changes you are making are managed well. The new teachers are very positive about the school and your leadership. Senior and middle leaders are clear about your vision and goals. The governing body and the local authority ensure that you receive good support and advice. Staff said that you listen to their ideas and that you have been very careful not to change too many things too quickly. They feel that morale is high and several said that you were 'like a breath of fresh air'.
- The curriculum is under constant review because the needs of pupils across the key stages are changing. Ensuring effective transition within and across key stages is a strength of the school. The curriculum is bespoke and personalised.
- Older pupils and students in the sixth form enjoy their work experience and practical learning, such as running the school's cafe and practising their horticultural skills in the school's garden. Leaders acknowledge that more curriculum activities should lead to some form of accreditation. They also agree that a wider range of media and communication aids would support some pupils to access the curriculum and stimulate their interest further. In a music session, one inspector saw that pupils and staff were totally absorbed learning together how to use music technology to good effect.
- My next line of enquiry was to investigate whether additional funding was used well to support pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Progress meetings allow leaders and teachers to assess pupils' personal needs, as well as their academic outcomes. Resources are then adjusted to ensure that these needs are met, although strategies to improve the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils must be consolidated. Inspectors noted that, in a few

classes, there were too many adults for the low number of pupils. A more flexible deployment of teaching assistants is required to maximise the impact of funding and to improve pupils' independence further.

- Senior leaders joined inspectors to look at how well policies were applied to manage pupils' behaviour. Staff ensure an effective balance between teaching pupils to take responsibility for their own actions and promoting positive relationships to keep their classmates safe. The sensory rooms and gardens are used well for this purpose. One pupil said, 'When I feel angry I can go out to the sensory garden to calm down.' Records show that incidents are investigated fully. In general, however, the website is not used well enough to keep families informed of current procedures and policies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum is enriched further through:
 - a relevant accreditation framework to reward the achievement of the most able pupils
 - better use of communication aids and modern technology to support learning, especially for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- communication with families is improved by:
 - updating some policies and making better use of the website
 - working with parents who are concerned about behaviour
 - supporting the few families who need help to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team inspector and I spoke with you, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. We met two members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to a representative from the local authority. Senior leaders joined inspectors on visits to classrooms where we looked at pupils'

work. We spoke with pupils and staff throughout the day. We observed pupils in lessons, during the lunch break and in their outdoor activities. I considered the school's own survey of pupils' views and the views of 20 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of 12 text messages sent by parents. In addition, 36 staff completed the staff questionnaire. We read the school documentation, including the school's improvement plan, your own review of the school's effectiveness and information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.