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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Laura Clarke
Headteacher
Rowan Gate Primary School
Finedon Road
Wellingborough
Northamptonshire
NN8 4NS

Dear Mrs Clarke

Short inspection of Rowan Gate Primary School - Two Sites

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 2019 with Ofsted Inspectors Jason Brooks and Joanne Ward, 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 outstanding in March 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Your school is a vibrant and welcoming place, where all pupils are supported in developing their self-esteem, communicating effectively using speech, sign and pictures and developing their social skills. They are provided with an outstanding quality of education from their individual starting points because learning is individualised and expectations are consistently high.

The excellent relationships built up over time ensure that the individual and often complex needs of pupils are at the centre of everything the school does on a daily basis. Pupils state that they enjoy coming to school, typically saying that school is 'brilliant'. They are safe, happy and content in school. This is because of the very high quality of staff who all know the pupils well. They show compassion and warmth and provide high-quality care. The curriculum and nurture group provision are relevant, interesting and enjoyable. They are supported by the very effective use of well-thought-out strategies that are used to maintain the well-being of pupils throughout the day.

During a time of planned change, including additions to the leadership and teaching teams, the development of the new provision at the Rowangate Primary School East site and a significant increase in pupil numbers, you and the governors have led and managed the school with determination and skill. Your collective vision and energy

have ensured that the expansion has been a success. You and your team have ensured that the outstanding strengths have been sustained, for example in the school's approach to nurturing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You and the leadership team have continued to create new opportunities and experiences for your pupils. This has enabled all pupils to experience a broad, exciting and vibrant curriculum with nurture at its core and where the arts, music and cultural visits are championed.

You, the governors and staff team are highly ambitious for the future of the school. There are very high expectations of pupils' behaviour, engagement and commitment to their learning. This is a 'can-do' school. The school's experienced safeguarding and family liaison team is very skilled in supporting pupils and their families. Advice and support are provided for parents, carers and older siblings. Levels of attendance are high. Most absences are due to medical appointments. There is excellent communication between the school and health agencies.

Governance is very strong. The chair of governors knows the school in detail. Governors consistently support and challenge leaders. They have a very accurate knowledge of the school's strengths. They provide a wide range of skills and experience and have significant specialist knowledge of leadership, finance and special educational needs and/or disabilities. They receive regular detailed reports on school developments, finance, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. They promote the work of the school in the local community and beyond, in Europe, as key participants in the Erasmus project. They have the skills and capacity to provide further outstanding developments for the school.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve achievement further by making sure that all adults who support learning have the subject knowledge needed to help pupils. You have managed this well and have ensured that there is a comprehensive training and continuing professional development programme in place. For example, you have made sure that all staff have been trained in understanding attachment, how autism spectrum disorder is linked to anxiety, how sensory integration approaches can desensitise pupils and how epilepsy can have an impact upon learning. Professional development is now an integral part of developing staff teams so that they can best support the pupils in school.

The overall quality of achievement and teaching in mathematics, English and nurture is very strong. However, some teachers are not as confident in their own knowledge when teaching subjects outside their main areas of expertise and, as a consequence, pupils' progress in areas such as 'topics' are not as secure.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding and care throughout the school. The two school sites are secure. Pupils state that they feel safe and are well supported in school. They know who to ask for help if they need it. Staff who responded to the Ofsted survey unanimously reported that pupils are safe at school. This excellent, caring, very calm provision lays the

foundations for promoting strong progress and positive, trusting relationships for pupils and their families. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are fit for purpose. The staff team is vigilant and all staff have received up-to-date training. Records, including those related to training, are regularly checked and reviewed. They are very detailed and securely kept. Leaders are tenacious in following up concerns and ensure that external agencies are involved when appropriate. Inspectors looked at and analysed in detail a small number of recent referrals to agencies requesting help and support for registered pupils. These records were detailed in terms of chronology and actions taken. Medical records are securely kept. The administration of medicine protocols and systems are secure. Medicines are stored safely. Those medicines that may be needed in an emergency are stored securely in classrooms or with the pupil who may need them. Health care plans are detailed and those viewed by inspectors are reviewed regularly.

You and the team take great pride in caring for pupils and their welfare. Multi-agency teams work with school staff to protect pupils from harm. They provide specialist support when needed. Support in the school is also provided by the school's family liaison officer, ably supported by the wider safeguarding team. She is very proactive in supporting pupils and their families. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well within the school. This information is provided in a sensitive age-appropriate way for pupils of all abilities.

Inspection findings

- The school is led exceptionally well by a strong and determined team. Together with governors, leaders ensure that pupils receive an excellent education. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. School improvement plans are focused on maintaining the high quality of education and on identifying areas for future development, care and support. Self-evaluation is accurate and honest. Governors rigorously hold leaders to account and play a key strategic role, checking on all areas of the school's work. In discussion with inspectors, governors have discovered that the policy schedule is not as up to date as it should be and, as a consequence, some school policies are out of date on the school's website. Governors have undertaken to address this error.
- The quality of teaching overall is very strong. Pupils make exceptional progress from their individual starting points in English and mathematics. They make at least good progress in the foundation subject areas and outcomes are outstanding for the vast majority of pupils. Achievement and outcome measures are moderated internally by the knowledgeable and experienced leadership team. School-based outcomes are then moderated three times a year by school leaders involved in the local teaching school partnerships. The local authority also shares the view that outcomes are outstanding overall. Inspectors found that, in topic books and the related curriculum planning, staff's subject knowledge was less strong in subjects other than mathematics and English.
- English and mathematics leaders are thoughtful and passionate about their subject areas and are proud of how they have developed the detailed curriculum across the school. Their subject plans are detailed, discussed with leaders and

governors and revised regularly to take account of the changing needs of pupil groups. It is clear that the curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced in mathematics and English. In mathematics, this has helped pupils to progress and develop both their breadth and depth of knowledge over time. This approach has ensured that pupils' mathematical skills are secure, for example in partitioning, multiplication, space, shape and measure, and problem-solving.

- In English lessons, inspectors observed that pupils were developing their writing skills. As a result of skilled teaching, pupils were able to write a detailed description of a character, using full stops, adjectives and capitals. This work was extended for most-able pupils.
- Work scrutiny of English books indicates significant progress in letter formation and handwriting. This progress is seen throughout the school.
- The nurture base provision is exemplary. There is a positive learning environment containing displays of pupils' art and communication work. This work is used to support progress in learning. Pupils are happy, safe and content in class. Teaching assistants are well deployed and are effective in guiding and supporting pupils' learning and good behaviour.
- Staff use their knowledge and skills to work with pupils in making sure that their targets from their individual education, health and care plans are delivered as part of the pupil's daily learning entitlement. Inspectors observed pupils being happy and engaged in their work. This engagement was supported by the effective use of praise and communication symbols where required.
- Pupils spoke very positively with inspectors about how much they enjoy school, trust adults and enjoy mathematics, English and drawing. They spoke very positively about birthday celebration assemblies, trips to the zoo and visits to other countries. Pupils know who to talk to if they need help. All but one pupil said that they enjoyed school. All stated that they feel safe in school.
- Parents' comments are very positive. A typical comment was, 'This school is a very special school where staff will go the extra mile.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers are supported in enhancing their understanding of content, skills and knowledge for those subject or topic areas outside their main areas of expertise.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Nixon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, a range of documentation was analysed, including: the school's own improvement plans and self-evaluation analysis; the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching; minutes of governing body meetings; a wide range of reports sent to the governors; and a range of the school's policies, procedures and protocols. Inspectors also scrutinised the school policy renewal schedule document. In addition, inspectors examined the information the school provides for families, such as information relating to safeguarding and child protection courses. They also looked at data relating to attendance and punctuality, information and case records relating to fixed-term exclusions and a range of risk assessments (contained in case files).

Together with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, inspectors observed lessons and undertook joint learning walks at both school sites. They scrutinised pupils' workbooks in class and separately across a range of subjects, including the nurture group base provision documents.

Inspectors discussed the work of the school in meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders and the chair, vice-chair and two parent members of the governing body. A telephone conversation also took place with the local authority senior school improvement officer. Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the day of the inspection and in a meeting with the school council.

Inspectors considered the range and quality of information provided on the school's website and information from the Ofsted staff survey, as well as parents' comments received during the inspection.