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Mrs Ann Hoffmann
Headteacher
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mrs Hoffmann

Short inspection of The St Francis Special School, Lincoln

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 2016 with Joanne Ward, 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 outstanding in June 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection of the day school. Since the inspection in June 2011 you have received four further inspections of your residential provision. Social care regulatory inspectors judged this part of your provision to also be outstanding on each of these occasions.

One parent wrote to inspectors and stated that 'St Francis School is an amazing school with excellent staff, it always goes the extra mile to make sure that all is ok. Children are children and not numbers on a spreadsheet. A truly special school.' Inspectors agree with this parent's view.

You, in your role as headteacher, are unanimously well respected by pupils, staff, parents and governors. You have established a culture where the staff are highly motivated to provide pupils with excellent levels of care and high-quality teaching. Pupils love coming to school. They feel valued and safe.

At the time of the last day school inspection, you were asked to ensure that the pace of learning and resources available take account of the needs of all pupils so that they remain engaged in their learning. During this inspection, inspectors were satisfied that pupils have access to appropriate resources and that staff are highly skilled in maintaining the attention of pupils during classroom activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are very effective and the safety of pupils is given the highest priority. Governors have ensured that an effective safeguarding policy is in place which is well understood by the staff team. The governor responsible for safeguarding has undertaken appropriate training and has significant professional expertise which allows him to provide a good level of challenge to school leaders.

There is a useful programme of induction for new staff which ensures that they understand their responsibilities for the safeguarding of pupils. Staff are regularly updated through online training and face-to-face sessions. These ensure that staff maintain their vigilance to spot signs which may indicate pupils at risk.

The procedures for the moving and handling of pupils, administration of medication and the safety of the school site all ensure that pupils undertake their education in an environment which helps them to feel well cared for. This supports them to make progress in their learning.

Pupils who were able to tell inspectors that they feel safe at school. Pupils who face challenges to communicate with unknown people displayed behaviours which led inspectors to believe they are extremely happy at the school. They demonstrate their trust in the adults they work regularly with by willingly participating in classroom activities, such as sensory stories and dance lessons.

All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that their child feels safe and is well looked after at the school. Parental comments such as 'A very caring school', 'The staff are kind, caring and positive role models' and 'I feel I can approach the staff about anything' were typical of the information received by inspectors. The close liaison between families and the school results in school staff having the information they need to meet pupils' needs and keep them safe.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school community with determination, confidence and an incredible calmness. You are ably supported by a highly skilled and credible senior team. Many staff commented how they appreciate your unwavering support for them both personally and professionally. One member of staff wrote to inspectors and stated that you are 'an inspirational headteacher that sees the potential in all the staff and lets them fly.' Inspectors agree that you have inspired your colleagues to fulfil their potential and improve their skills and knowledge. This results in pupils receiving their teaching from motivated members of staff, helping them to make excellent progress.
- Each aspect of the school day has been well thought out by you and your staff team. The pupils arrive at school on time and their entry into school is very well managed. This enables pupils to start their day in a positive way. Any non-attendance is immediately followed up with a phone call home to establish where the pupil is. Some pupils' attendance is not as good as

governors and leaders would like. School leaders are tenacious in attempting to improve the attendance of these pupils and this work usually has a positive impact.

- The money received by the school to support disadvantaged pupils is used wisely to benefit them. Pupil premium funding is used in a variety of ways. Throughout the inspection, senior leaders were able to show inspectors some of the resources purchased to support pupils to make progress. Inspectors observed pupils using this equipment to engage in their lessons. Pupils' progress is excellent. There is no defined group of pupils who make more or less progress than any other in the school.
- Since the last inspection, the school has started to cater for pupils with a wider range of need. During this inspection, inspectors looked specifically at the provision for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Individual targets and care plans are in place for these pupils, helping them to make progress. Specialist resources are in place and the environment is appropriate to meet the needs of these pupils. The school uses trampolines, music technology, hydrotherapy and sensory spaces well to develop pupils' skills in a variety of areas. For example, inspectors observed staff developing a pupil's communication skills in asking for more when bouncing on the trampoline.
- Leaders have ensured that there is a robust system of performance management in place for teachers and appraisal for support staff. Members of staff told inspectors that they find these processes supportive but challenging. There is a clear link between leaders' excellent knowledge of classroom practice, the identification of targets for staff and the opportunities for staff to develop their individual skills. The school has a strong track record of developing the professional expertise of members of staff who have limited experience of special educational needs or disability. Whatever their starting point, staff are supported to improve their work. This greatly benefits the pupils because the quality of their school experience is also constantly improving.
- Teaching is of a high quality. Staff ensure that the provision is tailored to the individual needs of pupils. Teachers' planning takes account of the key priorities for each pupil and this was clearly evident throughout our classroom observations. Pupils are often offered activities which are designed to meet their very specific needs. Each pupil is helped to develop their communication skills and nearly one third of pupils use alternative forms of communication to let others know about their thoughts, wishes and feelings. Several pupils have achieved meaningful accreditation and qualifications in the use of their communication systems. Staff are highly competent in developing this key aspect of pupils' development, leading to excellent rates of pupils' progress.
- The behaviour of pupils is exemplary. During classroom activities, pupils are focused and engaged in their learning because they are effectively supported to achieve their targets. The pupils' behaviour is also superb at breaktimes and lunchtimes. During these times, staff promote opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills without being intrusive to pupils. Those older pupils whom inspectors met during the lunchtime said that they 'work hard' at school and that they like the school because 'You can be

yourself here.' Inspectors noted throughout the inspection that individual difference was always celebrated.

- The governing body demonstrates a strong commitment to the constant improvement of the school. Governors are kept well informed about the day-to-day running of the school via the headteacher's and other leaders' reports, their own visits to the school and a pupils' representative who attends governing body meetings. Governors have a wealth of relevant personal and professional skills which enable them to challenge leaders effectively. They have an excellent understanding of how the local area, and not just the school, meets the needs of pupils. This includes knowledge of how health services operate and how the local authority commissions services for the pupils who attend St Francis School. This level of expertise allows the governing body to fulfil its strategic role by making the very best decisions for the pupils.
- The local authority, through its school improvement service, provides appropriate support and challenge to school leaders. The education adviser is a regular visitor to school. His helpful insights allow leaders to reflect on their work and improve outcomes for pupils.
- School leaders and governors agreed with inspectors that the system for checking how well pupils are learning could be improved. The staff know the pupils incredibly well. However, the system would benefit from ensuring that it identifies those pupils who could access further challenging opportunities to gain accreditation or qualifications in a particular aspect of the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the assessment system clearly identifies the pupils who could undertake further challenging accreditation or qualifications.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Harrison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the two assistant headteachers, the school business manager, four middle leaders, a representative from the local authority and five members of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke to the chair of the governing body over the telephone. Inspectors visited most classrooms,

accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. Inspectors interacted with and spoke with as many pupils as possible throughout the inspection. Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils throughout the school day, including at lunchtime. They considered the responses of 22 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 19 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths, information about the progress pupils make and records of the checks undertaken to ensure the suitability of staff to work with pupils.