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8 July 2019

Ms Ruth Carpenter  
Acting Headteacher  
Nancealverne School  
Madron Road  
Penzance  
TR20 8TP

Dear Ms Carpenter

### **Short inspection of Nancealverne School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 2019 with Justine Hocking, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

There have been two significant developments since the last inspection. The school has joined the Special Partnership Trust, a multi-academy trust comprised of four special schools in Cornwall. In June last year you became acting headteacher.

Since your appointment you have sustained the quality of education on offer at Nancealverne. The Special Partnership Trust has supported you by appointing an acting assistant headteacher. Despite the temporary leadership arrangements, trustees, governors, staff and parents see the school as improving rather than just being maintained.

When asked to sum up the culture of the school you described it as 'going above and beyond' to support pupils and their families. Staff, parents and governors echoed this description. It is also clearly demonstrated by the attitudes seen around your school. Staff have close, caring relationships with pupils. There are effective systems of communication with pupils' families. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the support provided by the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school. A comment by one pupil typifies this: 'I have made friends here. I don't have to only work with adults like I used to at my old school.'

Governors are proud to work with your school. They visit regularly and are very involved in the life of the school. Governors provide challenge and support to you and other leaders. They are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths as

well as the areas you wish to develop. Governors recognise the positive impact your leadership has had on the school. They can see that, despite the temporary nature of your appointment, you have taken full responsibility for continuing to improve the school.

The areas for improvement from the last inspection of the predecessor school have been addressed effectively. Leaders were asked to improve the provision to develop pupils' communication skills. There are now a wide range of communication techniques used to meet individuals' needs. Every room has a label with a range of communication methods. This gives pupils independence in identifying different rooms. Leaders have introduced a 'sign of the week' to promote the effective use of signing. This ensures that all staff build the skills needed to communicate effectively with pupils. In class, pupils benefit from the use of individualised communication aids. These are carefully tailored by staff to individual pupils' needs. This enables each pupil to participate fully in lessons. The result is that they can make progress in learning.

Leaders were also asked to increase opportunities for pupils to engage in community activities and work experience. Leaders have embedded this aspect into school life for all pupils. From the youngest pupils in the school through to the sixth-form students, there is encouragement for all pupils to look at the different types of work people do. Every off-site trip must include a focus on the types of jobs seen during the visit. In key stage 3, there are volunteering opportunities, for example in a local residential care home. This makes thinking about work opportunities more concrete for pupils. In key stages 4 and 5, pupils and their parents receive support to choose their next placements. Leaders have established a well-structured curriculum to promote work-related learning. This has resulted in pupils having a clear understanding of the different options available when they leave your school. They are empowered to make informed choices about their future.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. The care and attention given to all pupils reflect this. Staff place the highest priority on pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders ensure that all staff are thoroughly trained to support the pupils in their care. Appropriate and timely training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. They are vigilant about potential risks.

Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The safeguarding governor has attended appropriate training. He visits the school and provides oversight and scrutiny of relevant processes.

All staff have a strong working knowledge of safeguarding issues and understand the potential risks to pupils. They engage closely with parents and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

The systems to safeguard pupils are robust and rigorously monitored by leaders. Safeguarding concerns raised by staff result in swift actions by leaders. Pupils say that they feel safe and know that they can share any concerns with an adult.

### **Inspection findings**

- I wanted to find out how effectively leaders have maintained the quality of education. At the last inspection the headteacher was described as 'very ambitious for the future of the school'. I wanted to see if the acting leadership team shared this attitude.
- It is evident that you are ambitious for the school. You have continued to develop the curriculum so that it meets the needs of your pupils. The acting assistant headteacher has supported you by ensuring that the school's assessment system is accurately linked to this curriculum. You have ensured that there are effective systems in place to check the quality of teaching. It is clear that both you and the acting assistant headteacher have an accurate view of the high quality of teaching in your school. You both have clear plans to ensure that the quality of teaching improves even further. However, you recognise that middle leaders need further development. At present they do not have all the skills and knowledge needed to take responsibility for this improvement.
- I wanted to know if the teaching of English and mathematics has remained strong. The last inspection of your predecessor school identified this as a strength. There is a strong emphasis on developing independence in learning in these subjects. This is evident in lessons and in pupils' work. Teachers have high expectations for pupils. They set challenging targets based on information taken from pupils' education, health and social care plans. This ensures that each pupil has a highly individualised programme of learning in both mathematics and English. The skilful use of communication aids supports pupils' learning very effectively. Pupils can take a full part in lessons. This results in them making progress.
- I also wanted to know about pupils' rates of attendance. This is because, in the past, the proportion of pupils who were regularly absent from school was above the national average. Current figures show that absence is now below the national average. This is the result of attendance being a significant focus for the acting leadership team. Leaders monitor attendance closely. Staff undertake home visits for pupils when they have concerns. This enables leaders to provide extra support for families if required.
- There remain some pupils for whom attendance is low. This is because of their medical needs. You understand the reasons why these pupils are absent from school and you do all that you can to ensure that they attend regularly. For example, you have investigated transport for pupils with health issues. This has resulted in the organisation of specialist transportation so that these pupils can still attend school. You have robust systems in place to ensure that those pupils who are absent from school are safe.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders are equipped to drive forward further developments in teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders. An inspector met with four members of the local governing body and with representatives from the Special Partnership Trust. An inspector had telephone conversations with the chief executive officer of the Special Partnership Trust and your school improvement partner.

Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at social times. An inspector spoke with a group of parents.

Leaders accompanied inspectors on visits to classrooms, where they observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects. They looked at pupils' work across the school.

Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They scrutinised a range of policies and leaders' school improvement plan and self-evaluation. Inspectors checked on the school's website.

Inspectors considered the responses of seven parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, along with free-text comments. They took account of 37 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.