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Dr Kim Taylor  
Headteacher  
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Dear Dr Taylor

### **Short inspection of Spring Common Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 27 November 2018 with James Adkins, 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 December 2012.

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

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

Since the previous inspection, the school's reputation has continued to strengthen. You are held in high esteem by other schools and the local authority. Leadership at all levels is exceptionally strong. Your role as a national leader in education supporting mainstream and special schools has expanded. Spring Common leads the teaching school alliance called the Discovery Teaching School Alliance. The school disseminates best practice by working closely with local trusts. You organise an annual special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) conference each year for schools in the local area.

Your investment in staff training and professional development pays dividend. Many of your team have achieved promotional posts. Well-considered succession planning ensures that any staff transitions are seamless. You do not shy away from insisting upon the highest quality staff in your workforce.

There is a shared sense of determination for ensuring that your pupils receive the highest standard of education. Staff share your aspiration for pupils and have created a welcoming environment where pupils can flourish both academically and in their personal development. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally positive.

Pupils enjoy school. Their behaviour around the school is praiseworthy. They are polite to visitors, respectful to staff and to each other. Staff understand that behaviour is a form of communication. Any concerns about behaviour are dealt with promptly.

Parents are highly positive of the school. 100% of parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school. They unanimously agree that their children are safe, and staff take good care of them.

Trustees are experienced and knowledgeable, guaranteeing that the school has the strategic direction it needs to sustain excellence. Trustees share a remarkably strong dedication to providing an outstanding quality of education for pupils within their school. Trustees ask very probing questions, which helps increase their awareness of the school's performance. Trustees agree that the school could expand its work even further to support the leadership of SEND in other schools, now that it has become a multi-academy trust.

The only area for improvement identified at the last inspection, regarding further development of the school website, has been addressed. It can now be used effectively and extensively by parents, pupils and other visitors to find out information about the school and its activities. You make sure that parents are kept well informed through the home-school diary, parent mail, regular website updates and a newsletter which is produced every half term. Parents can visit the school to talk to staff about their children, attend parents' evenings every term, and attend education, health and care (EHC) plan meetings.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your staff rightly place safeguarding at the forefront of your work. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All mandatory checks and pre-employment checks are robust. Trustees are suitably trained and check the single central record of these checks for themselves. The school's culture of vigilance ensures that any concerns are followed up diligently. Record-keeping is fastidious. You are proactive in working with external agencies to ensure the correct support for your vulnerable pupils. Appropriate training for staff and trustees is undertaken frequently and is up to date, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism.

Movement around the school is managed with precision so that for example, pupils arrive and leave school in a safe and orderly way. At these times, pupils are escorted carefully by staff from and to their mode of transport. Pupils say that they feel safe and well cared for in the school. They feel confident that adults will help them if needed.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed to focus on the impact of the curriculum on pupils' progress to

establish if it is suitably personalised to their needs. Lessons stimulate pupils' thinking and staff use a range of communication aids to check that learning is at a suitable pace. Lessons are fun and are planned to meet the individual needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

- A very strong feature of the school is the detailed knowledge that staff have of the needs of each pupil. The way in which pupils' individual EHC plans are linked to the curriculum is a strength. The school works closely with parents and pupils to ensure that these plans are highly meaningful and relevant. Pupils make impressive progress due to high-quality teaching that is informed by accurate assessment.
- Observations in classrooms demonstrate the highly successful and seamless partnership between teachers and teaching assistants. Staff develop pupils' learning together, whether it be sensory, social, skills-based or knowledge-based. The high quality of work undertaken by teaching assistants ensures that pupils are provided with the highest level of provision.
- We agreed to explore how effective leaders are at ensuring that the welfare needs of pupils are met, as many of your pupils are vulnerable. You take the well-being of pupils very seriously. Staff treat pupils with the utmost respect. They prioritise learning which ensures that pupils know how to stay safe and make sure that that the learning environment is personalised to their needs.
- The key therapeutic approaches you adopt are woven through every aspect of the school, including the curriculum. You justifiably insist that all staff who work with pupils undertake training in these approaches. Consequently, staff have high levels of professional expertise, which they use to the benefit of the pupils. Every aspect of care is planned in precise detail.
- You are an autism-accredited school. You have a team of specialist staff who support the delivery of an effective educational experience to children with autism spectrum disorder. Highly individualised programmes of work support these pupils' development and welfare.
- An area of focus during the inspection was how successful post-16 education is and whether courses are personalised according to students' interests and needs. A range of qualifications are available. Lessons encourage students to learn much-needed life skills. Restaurant days and 'pop-up' shops enhance literacy and numeracy opportunities. They also support the development of students' culinary and social skills. Staff share a strong determination to ensure that pupils are prepared with the skills of independence they need to flourish.
- Students participate in work placements that allow them to experience the world of work in supportive environments. When leaving post-16 education, their transition is comprehensive and thorough. It is personalised to the needs of both the student and family and conducted with care and sensitivity. All students are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education. This is because of the school's careful transition programme that considers pupils' desires and anxieties.
- Pupils' attendance is very good. Overall, their attendance is approaching the national average for all schools and is above the national average for similar

schools. Persistent absence is high when the unavoidable long-term medical absence of a small number of pupils is taken into consideration. You make sure that everything is done to help these pupils catch up and keep up with their school work. During this inspection, we observed excellent practice when staff acted quickly to follow up absenteeism.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school continues to support other schools in developing strong practice in the leadership of SEND to raise standards
- the admirable quality of education continues for pupils at the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We visited all classrooms together, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. We also spoke to teachers and teaching assistants if this did not interrupt pupils' learning. I undertook these visits with you and my colleague with the deputy headteacher. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding.

I spoke to the school's improvement adviser and a local authority representative by telephone and met with the chair of the board of trustees and other senior leaders. My colleague spoke to a group of pupils. We observed behaviour throughout the school day, including at breaktime.

We considered the response of 17 parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the parent questionnaire responses which the school had collated. We also considered the 43 responses to the online staff survey as well as the school's own staff survey results. There were no responses to the online pupil survey.