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Ms Heather Davies
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Davies

Short inspection of The Bridge at HLC

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with David Rzeknik, 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 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You, supported by a committed and highly skilled leadership team, have maintained the outstanding quality of education since the last inspection. As a result of your relentless pursuit of improvement, pupils make rapid and sustained progress in a calm and caring environment. Your staff are confident and effective because they have a deep understanding of pupils' abilities and needs.

Since the last inspection, you have been appointed as a national leader of education, the school has become a national support school, you have established a teaching school and trained a workforce of specialist leaders of education. You and your governors have done these things wisely, without distracting the school from its core purpose.

Governors are effective in challenging and supporting the school. They are experienced and knowledgeable, ensuring that the school has the resources and strategic direction it needs to maintain excellence. They make sure that all of the additional funding that the school receives has a marked impact on outcomes for pupils.

The school is a happy and positive place to be. In lessons, pupils enjoy learning and behave well. Pupils told inspectors about the wide range of activities they enjoy each week and the way in which these activities help improve their self-esteem, well-being and sense of community. For example, many pupils enjoy being a part of the large choir, where pupils use a wide range of communicative methods to create

high-quality performance pieces. Many enjoy the sport on offer, the playground equipment, being a mentor to other pupils, public speaking and gardening. Inspectors observed pupils doing these activities with exuberance and pride.

Staff treat pupils with high levels of respect. For example, when helping pupils eat, staff make sure that they don't rush, allowing pupils to enjoy their food. Pupils are consistently offered choices, asked their opinion, are informed of what is happening and allowed time to respond to questions. As a result, pupils treat staff with warmth and respect.

Both staff and parents and carers are highly positive about the school. Staff say that they are proud that they work at The Bridge. One parent commented: 'This is an amazing school. I feel privileged to have my children cared for and educated at The Bridge.' This is representative of many other comments that inspectors received.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and there is an extremely strong culture of safeguarding across the school. For example, the arrangements for pupils' arrival and departure are managed with precision so that even though there are many buses to organise each day, pupils arrive and leave in a safe and orderly way. At these times, pupils are escorted expertly by staff. Many are carefully encouraged to get onto their buses independently.

When staff identify safeguarding issues, they deal with them effectively, making swift referrals when necessary and working with other services closely to make sure that pupils remain safe.

Throughout the school, the environment is orderly and well organised. This means that even though the school is full of complex equipment, risks are well managed so that pupils are safe as they move around.

Inspection findings

- When pupils join the school, leaders ensure that they have a detailed and accurate profile of their abilities and needs. This baselining is done in partnership with the pupil, healthcare and educational professionals, and parents. This means that there is no underestimation of pupils' abilities. As a result, leaders have a robust measure of pupils' progress over time.
- In lessons, assessment is consistent and effective. Teachers often make highly sophisticated adjustments to tasks so that they meet pupils' wide range of needs. As a result, pupils' progress over time is impressive. The vast majority of pupils reach their ambitious targets and many exceed them. This consistency of approach means that pupils' progress is sustained over time and is, for many pupils, rapid.
- Teachers and leaders have a well-developed understanding of pupils' behaviour. They see behaviour as a way of communicating. Consequently, they help pupils

to manage their behaviour, and incidents of poor behaviour are very rare. This means that pupils are able to make progress with few interruptions.

- Where pupils do not use verbal communication, staff are expert in listening to the variety of ways in which they communicate. These pupils can, therefore, communicate in a sophisticated way with staff. They share their thoughts, likes, dislikes, feelings, and, occasionally, a joke. This leads to strong progress in pupils' communication and personal skills.
- 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 low when the unavoidable, long-term medical absence of a small number of pupils is taken into consideration.
- To set targets and evaluate pupils' progress, leaders use the most recently available national progression information for pupils with similar starting points. They set individual targets for each pupil and track progress towards these targets carefully. Leaders acknowledge that the national progression information does not always allow them to account for the wide variety of abilities in the school, or the small steps of progress some pupils make. They are working with nationally recognised figures in special education to develop a new system. This new system aims to help them better evaluate each pupils' progress individually, while allowing leaders and governors to have an overview of progress across the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- continue to respond to national developments in the monitoring of pupils' progress in special schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a local authority adviser, school consultant, governors and the school council. They visited lessons across all phases to observe pupils in lessons, sampled pupils' baseline records and their work, and internal reports and reports to parents. The views of staff were evaluated through the 24 responses to the online survey.

Parents' views were considered through the 14 responses to Parent View and nine free-text responses. There were no responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors observed pupils at break- and lunchtime, visited the school choir and observed pupils arriving and leaving the school. They scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those related to safeguarding.