

24 June 2019

Mrs Caroline Jewell
Headteacher
Curnow School
Drump Road
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Dear Mrs Jewell

Short inspection of Curnow School

Following my visit to the school on 11 June 2019 with Mark Burgess, 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 outstanding in January 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

There have been significant changes at Curnow School since the last inspection. The school has joined with other special schools in Cornwall to create the Special Partnership Trust. The previous headteacher has been seconded to the trust as executive headteacher. The school is now on two sites. Primary-aged pupils are now educated in a new building on a site that is shared with the Illogan primary school.

Since your appointment you have built on the school's success. You provide clear leadership. With other leaders, staff, governors and representatives of the trust, you ensure that Curnow pupils are inspired, enjoy school, learn well and make progress so that they are well prepared for adult life. Staff say that they enjoy working at the school. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very complimentary about the school's work. Typical comments from parents as part of the inspection survey included, 'a totally superb experience for our son', 'staff are all amazing' and 'the school has done wonders.'

Pupils learn in an environment that is respectful of the individual, whatever their disability. Staff take time to listen, understand and respond. Pupils therefore develop attention, curiosity and, even though they may have significant needs, strong relationships with adults and a love of learning. Staff ensure that pupils are challenged to make the best possible progress. Pupils therefore learn to

communicate more effectively and make informed choices. They develop skills in personal care, literacy and numeracy and are well prepared to go to college when they leave.

Safeguarding is effective.

The respectful ethos of the school underpins the care pupils receive and the school's safeguarding practice. Staff know pupils very well. They are in tune with their communication, so notice any changes of behaviour or if a pupil is unsettled. Strong communication with home means that concerns can be shared and explored.

Effective policies are in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Staff are well trained. Consequently, staff know the actions they must take if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. As the designated safeguarding lead, you examine trends in behaviour incidents and attendance to ensure that you have a complete picture. You hold regular meetings with external professionals to consider the more complex cases. This ensures that there is good communication and a multi-agency response to support pupils and their families.

The arrangements for staff recruitment, vetting and training are suitable and up to date. The single central record of checks is maintained diligently. Governors have a good knowledge of safeguarding through your regular reports. The trust strengthens your work by updating policies and maintaining external links to further enhance practice.

Pupils say that they feel safe. Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey agree. Pupils are clear that adults would help them if they were concerned. Through your carefully planned curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. Depending on pupils' age and developmental level, you teach them about appropriate relationships and keeping themselves safe, including internet safety.

Inspection findings

- One of the key lines of enquiry was to consider how leaders, including governors and the trust, had maintained the outstanding nature of the school, given the significant changes to Curnow's status and the site and the changes in leadership.
- It is clear that change has not interrupted the school's outstanding work but has been a catalyst to improve even more. Driven by the shared vision, you have used these opportunities to continue to strengthen the school's offer to pupils.
- Joining with other schools in the Special Partnership Trust has been an opportunity to strengthen your collaborative work. Your staff have had opportunities to disseminate their outstanding practice to others and to learn and develop their own practice further. The support from the trust, including in managing finance, has meant that your local governing body can focus even more on their support of and challenge to teaching, learning and pupils' progress.

- Moving to two sites has significantly enhanced the school's offer to pupils. Both secondary and primary pupils benefit from more age-appropriate facilities. The ethos and expectations are well matched to their age. Primary-aged pupils have opportunities to work and play alongside their mainstream peers. Individuals have formed new friendships and experienced the challenge of joining learning in mainstream classrooms. Pupils are stimulated by the activity of the vibrant primary environment that widens their learning experiences. On the secondary site, you have been able to develop better facilities, for example a workshop environment where pupils learn practical skills. These facilities have strengthened the school's ability to provide opportunities to prepare pupils for adult life.
- Changes to leadership have also enhanced the school's work. The experienced executive headteacher provides important continuity and supports you in your work. Senior leaders have had opportunities to take on new challenges of managing sites or departments. Individuals have grown to take new responsibilities and do this very effectively. The school's overall capacity for leadership and management has been further improved.
- Another key line of enquiry explored how leaders have maintained the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the last inspection. High expectations and very clear systems underpin all your work. Detailed assessments ensure that pupils have individual and appropriately challenging targets. Knowledgeable staff works as class teams to weave these targets carefully into interesting activities that stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils are therefore engaged and curious. They make excellent progress. Leaders, governors and trustees monitor the quality of teaching diligently and monitor pupils' progress. You continually support staff to consider new ways of helping pupils learn. You encourage innovation.
- A third line of enquiry evaluated the effectiveness of the curriculum. Leaders' long-term intention that the school's curriculum should enable pupils to enjoy learning and prepare for life is clearly evident. Pathways and specialist approaches give clear rationale and purpose. Leaders are successful in providing an age-appropriate curriculum that incorporates targets from education, health and care plans and is responsive to the very particular needs of pupils. Staff work with parents to understand their priorities. Teachers build in targets set by other professionals, such as speech and language therapists or occupational therapists. The school recognises the pupils' own aspirations in the 'Curnow pledge'. This flexible and highly individualised curriculum means that pupils are very well prepared for their next steps.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school maintains the high expectations for pupils and the high-quality education that already exists.

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 Special Partnership 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

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders, teachers, members of the trustees, the local governing body and the executive headteacher and chief executive officer of the Special Partnership Trust. We observed learning in classrooms and looked at pupils' work. We spoke with members of the school council and other pupils informally. We scrutinised documentation from the school on a range of matters, including safeguarding and school improvement. Inspectors took account of 20 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and their additional comments through free-text or by telephone. We also considered responses of staff to the Ofsted online survey.