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Paul Boulton
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Dear Mr Boulton

Short inspection of Royal School for the Blind (Liverpool)

Following my visit to the school on 26 January 2016 with Clare McGarey, 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, together with school leaders and governors are ambitious for the school. Plans to broaden the school's provision to include early years and post-19 facilities are well on the way to fruition. However, leaders have not taken their eye off the ball and are keen to raise standards still further.

An air of calm permeates the school. There is no doubt that pupils fortunate enough to be part of Royal School for the Blind (RSB), are well cared for by an experienced, skilful and dedicated staff team. Parents we spoke with agree with this and said 'the commitment from staff is unreal, they are like an extended family'.

Pupils start at the school with very low starting points due to their multiple disabilities and visual impairment. Adults' expectations of what pupils who attend RSB can achieve, particularly in terms of their personal and physical development, are unquestionably high. Leaders and other adults use, exceptionally well, the school buildings and grounds to provide a vast range of exciting experiences which stimulate pupils' senses at every opportunity. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is first-rate because adults' modelling of this aspect of pupils' learning is of an equally high calibre. By the time pupils leave the school they have grown in confidence, begun to develop their independence skills, gained basic qualifications and are prepared very well for their next steps and life beyond RSB.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are and feel safe at the school. Parents who we spoke with and who responded to the online questionnaire overwhelmingly agree with this view. One parent said, 'we feel our daughter is safe in their care and very well looked after, which means everything to us'.

You and your staff team work extremely hard to ensure pupils' specific welfare needs are met with dignity and humility. Additional professionals, such as the medical care team, for instance, ensure that pupils' specific medical needs are met to a high standard and in a timely fashion. Training for all staff has been tailored well to the challenges associated with the complex range of disabilities experienced by these pupils. As a result, all adults are knowledgeable in how to keep this very vulnerable group of pupils safe.

Since your appointment in April 2015, your actions and those of your senior team have further improved the safety and safeguarding of pupils. The school's systems to monitor, check and register all visitors and volunteers to the school are rigorous. Evidence in pupils' personal files shows that risk assessments are made for a variety of activities and these are bespoke to pupils' particular needs. Leaders' records show that they keep detailed accounts of incidents, including the actions taken by adults following the incident. These actions demonstrate the school's very strong and effective safeguarding procedures. However, some of the school's documents and records do not fully reflect this efficacious practice. The school's published safeguarding policy is not strong because it contains gaps, in terms of staff training and local authority contact details for example, along with confusing terminology. Also, although the school carries out appropriate suitability checks on all of its staff and volunteers, the school's single central record does not provide an efficient record of the school's checking of recruitment procedures. We found no evidence to indicate that these lapses impact negatively on current pupils' safety and welfare.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors know the school well; they know where the school's strengths are and what needs to be done to improve the school further. Leaders' own evaluation of how well the school is doing is detailed and accurate. Leaders have appropriately identified the strengthening of links with other outstanding schools in order to ensure pupils benefit from teachers' sharing of good practice. Leaders plan to use their links with other schools to check the precision of teachers' assessments as a means of improving teaching further. However, some other actions in the school's development plan are not matched specifically to the intended impact on pupils' outcomes. You and governors, therefore, are not yet able to evaluate precisely the effectiveness of all of your actions.
- Teaching is effective because teachers combine their strong subject knowledge with their understanding of pupils' specific needs well. Teachers use their assessment of what pupils are able to do in order to plan activities which capture their interest. For example, a teacher used a sounding bowl

to encourage one pupil to participate in music making. In this instance the pupil tapped on the bowl and smiled when the teacher played the strings. This was an indication of very strong and inspired learning taking place.

- Learning is brought to life at every opportunity. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and have very positive attitudes towards attending school. Parents agree with this view; as one commented, 'They plan activities which are great for each child's disability and encourage learning in a fun way'. I observed several pupils making their way eagerly to the school's incubator in order to check the progress of the chicken eggs being hatched as part of a whole-school science project. One pupil was excited to talk to us about his meeting with two local radio celebrities. We observed other pupils smiling and being animated as they were benefiting from sensory stimulation in the school's sensory garden. Files of evidence presented by the school showed that a small proportion of pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 take part in work experience placements within the local community. These actions are examples of pupils being engaged successfully in their learning and, as a consequence, progressing at a rate appropriate to their ability.
- Robust teaching, both in and out of the classroom, is leading to strong outcomes for the pupils at RSB. The school's precise tracking of pupils' development in terms of their independence, accuracy, memory and appreciation of different settings, demonstrates clearly pupils' excellent progress.
- Learners who leave the school at the end of Key Stage 5 often achieve a range of appropriate external accreditations, which include the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Lifeskills Challenge modules, for example. The school's records show that last year all school leavers entered an appropriate specialist college placement. Furthermore, school records also indicate that all of these learners are still attending their college. This is an indication that learners were prepared very well for this significant step in their life.
- The school's wealth of additional specialist therapies, including physiotherapy, speech and language, hydrotherapy and rebound for example, contribute significantly to pupils' learning. Well-trained professionals work closely with teachers and support assistants to develop systems and activities which are matched expertly to pupils' specific needs. A school leader demonstrated to me that by making use of a standing frame, fitted by the physiotherapy team, pupils are able to access the curriculum in a manner appropriate to their ability. In one instance, a pupil in a standing frame was steady, able to concentrate for longer than they would have been without the frame, and able to locate and grasp objects. These are signs that pupils benefit from these actions, because they experience success and are interested and engaged in their learning.
- The excellent work of the school's mobility team is evident throughout the school. Opportunities abound for pupils to begin to build their spatial

awareness, a sense of the world around them and, above all, independent movement skills. Handrails and a variety of other objects, such as inflatable armbands at the door of the hydrotherapy pool, are placed strategically to give pupils landmarks and supported movement trails around the school. As a result, the most-able pupils move independently around the school while those who need support are reassured by touching familiar objects which prepare them for the next activity. These actions contribute effectively to pupils' strong personal development and their overall progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all of the school's safeguarding documentation is unambiguous and supportive of the schools strong practice, by sharpening both the published safeguarding policy and the single central record of recruitment checks
- leaders evaluate precisely the effectiveness of all of their actions, by identifying specifically the intended impact of any plans for improvement that they make.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We held conversations with you and other leaders, three governors, a range of staff, a small number of parents and one pupil.
- We observed a selection of lessons across the school, some of which were observed jointly with you.
- We looked at pupils' work during our visits to classrooms.
- We observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils at breaktime.
- We took account of responses to surveys by pupils, parents and staff.
- We scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school.