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Mrs Sally McFarlane
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Dear Mrs McFarlane

Short inspection of Ladywood School

Following my visit to the school on 21 January 2016, 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Ladywood School, without a shadow of doubt, lives up to its motto of 'Believe and Achieve'. Leaders are unrelenting in their pursuit of excellence for all pupils, who are lucky enough to be associated with the school. Ladywood is an asset to the local authority and should be held up as a beacon of success where teaching is excellent and pupils learn and are cared for exceptionally well.

The keys to the school's success are the strong relationships between adults and pupils and their parents, along with the staff's detailed knowledge and understanding of each pupil's specific needs. Excellent teamwork in the school, made possible as a result of precise information about pupils' needs supplied by the school's outreach team, and high-quality training delivered through the teaching school team, promotes learning at every opportunity. Highly effective communication between parents and the school contributes enormously to pupils' personal development, because this is a two-way process in which parents and the school learn from each other.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. All adults have received appropriate training in how to keep children safe. All governors, along with the senior leadership team, have undertaken safer recruitment training. All staff are appropriately trained in the use of safe physical intervention strategies. A high proportion of staff are trained in paediatric first aid, the administration of medication and the intimate care of pupils. Such training ensures that pupils are safe in school. However, records of the use of physical interventions need to be strengthened so that the school can identify trends and patterns even more quickly than it already does.

Leaders act decisively to ensure any concerns relating to the safeguarding of pupils are monitored appropriately and, when necessary, passed to the appropriate bodies for further action. Pupils and their parents alike feel that they are safe in school. In discussion, pupils gave examples of their training in how to keep safe online, evacuating the building in an emergency and whom to talk to if they have a worry as reasons why they feel safe in school. One parent wrote in response to the online survey, 'My child is extremely happy at school and I have the peace of mind knowing that he is safe and well cared for from the moment he gets to school'. Leaders have planned to enhance safeguarding provision still further by commissioning additional training for all staff in the risk of radicalisation and extremism, along with a range of other training matched to the specific needs of this group of pupils. This action is a strong indication of leaders' drive for continuous improvement in all aspects of the school.

Inspection findings

Pupils, their parents and staff working at the school are overwhelmingly supportive of its leaders, the work the school does and the impact it has on pupils' progress. For example, almost all pupils who responded to the survey said that they were happy, felt safe, had friends, made progress, received help and liked coming to school. Parents who responded to the online survey, along with those whom I spoke with, were able to support their view that 'Ladywood is an excellent school'. For example, one parent wrote of her daughter, 'all areas of her development are flourishing because her individual learning plan is tailored to suit her needs and she really loves to learn in this environment'. Other examples include, 'she has made fantastic progress academically due to the individualised curriculum, wonderful teaching and support from all the brilliant staff', and, 'my child has been given a wealth of opportunity: going on a residential, singing in the choir, drumming at the Reebok and participating in a historical theme about Bolton. Ladywood has helped my child to reach his potential and have high expectations for his future'. These views were corroborated through lesson observation, and discussions with leaders, other staff and pupils, and through my scrutiny of a range of documentation provided by the school.

- Teaching has improved further since the last inspection. No stone is left unturned in the drive to build on what is already excellent teaching. New teachers and support staff take part in a robust induction programme which results in no time being wasted in ensuring that teaching is of a consistently high standard.
- Excellent use is made of the school's teaching school status by providing high-quality training for all adults in the school. For example, all staff received training in a programme, developed by the teaching school team, designed to boost the basic communication skills of pupils. As a result of this initiative, the school's records show that those pupils involved in the project improved their speech and language skills rapidly. One pupil was able to name and match colours, while another was able to ask questions, for example. Neither of these pupils had mastered these skills prior to their involvement in the project. Both are examples of excellent progress.
- Leaders have raised the bar in terms of outcomes for pupils at Ladywood. Expectations are uncompromisingly high throughout the school and as a result, many pupils reach similar standards as their peers in mainstream schools. Teachers use their accurate checks of what each pupil can do to set activities that are well matched to pupils' specific needs. Pupils are eager to take up any challenge set for them because invariably, they find learning interesting. For example, in lessons I observed pirates telling tales to engrossed pupils who were learning how to emphasise key words when reading stories, and white-coated scientists exploring the human digestive system. In these, along with other examples, I saw outstanding learning taking place.
- The school's outreach team makes an excellent contribution to the work of the school. Information provided by the outreach team about the specific needs of pupils ensures that adults know the pupils well. In turn, teachers and support staff are able to plan meticulously to ensure pupils joining the school make the best start possible. My scrutiny of leaders' evidence of how quickly pupils settled into life at Ladywood showed that pupils who were known to the outreach team prior to joining the school were quicker to progress compared with those not known by the team. However, the analysis of progress information by leaders is not always rigorous. As a result, leaders do not always evaluate the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes precisely enough.

- Pupils' behaviour in and around school is excellent because their personal development and welfare are given the highest priority by all those working at the school. Classrooms are a haven of learning, celebrating unashamedly the achievements of pupils at the school. Pupils' learning difficulties are never used as an excuse. Consequently, every pupil experiences a vast range of activities both in and beyond school. By the time they leave the school, they are beginning to mature and develop into well-rounded young people who are able to make a positive contribution to society.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they strengthen further their records of the use of physical interventions, so that they can identify trends and patterns even more quickly and take rapid action when the need arises
- they sharpen their own analysis of progress information, so that they can evaluate even more precisely the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- My day started with a presentation by you and the senior leadership team, describing why, in your view, the school continued to be outstanding.
- I had conversations with you and other leaders, four governors, teachers, a small number of parents, several pupils and a representative from the local authority.
- I observed a selection of lessons across the school, some of which were joint observations with you.
- I looked at pupils' work during my visits to classrooms. I also scrutinised samples of pupils' work displayed on walls around the school and in books provided by the school.

- I observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils as they ate their lunch.
- I took account of responses to surveys by pupils, parents and staff.
- I scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school, including self-evaluation by leaders, the school's development plan and information on attendance. I also examined documents used to record behaviour and safeguarding concerns, information relating to pupils' progress, and records of leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning.