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Mrs K Webster
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Webster

Short inspection of Clare Mount Specialist Sports College

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2016 with Ann Gill, 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 October 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher, you have established a very effective and ambitious senior team of staff who work seamlessly together in the best interests of your pupils. Staff, governors and pupils alike are proud to be part of Clare Mount and share your ambitions of success for all.

Key ingredients to your success are the excellent relationships between staff and pupils and your in-depth knowledge of every individual. Because of your meticulous attention to detail, you have maintained the high standards at Clare Mount, despite ongoing changes to staffing and the changing characteristics and needs of new pupils joining the school.

Clare Mount is an oasis of calm. You work very hard with pupils and families who are new to the school, helping them to settle in quickly. The support given to pupils is of very high quality and is just enough to help them to learn independently. Pupils' personal development is a real strength. Pupils are given excellent opportunities to represent the school in a variety of ways. These include taking part in competitions and festivals and also volunteering at major events, such as the London Olympic Games and the Royal Open golf championship.

Support is matched closely to individual need, which means that pupils are well cared for. One parent said, 'This school is wonderful – it has improved our son's life

more than words can say.' This is typical of the many positive comments expressed by parents who gave a view of your school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors reported that staff were not always using their assessment of pupils' learning well enough to make sure that learning activities were well matched to individual needs. This is an area that you have developed well and is now a strong aspect of your work. Teachers are skilled at knowing where all pupils need to get to, for example to gain a relevant qualification. Teachers then plan activities, in small steps where necessary, to ensure that pupils gain the knowledge needed. In lessons, we saw pupils and students completing learning on the same theme, but their independent learning was adapted well so they were challenged at appropriate levels. Your staff are also completely adept at knowing when pupils need support and when they can fend for themselves. As one child remarked, 'When the teachers go home, they think about us and what we need to do next.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough and effective. Leaders ensure that detailed checks are completed on any adults working in the school and records are of high quality. Records observed of your work with vulnerable pupils show that concerns are noted clearly and are followed up quickly, with relevant external agencies becoming involved where appropriate. The many activities regularly taking place out of school are planned carefully. Risk assessments show the high level of thought which considers the safety of all pupils during activities, such as residential trips.

Regular training takes place so that all staff are well placed to deal with any concerns as they arise. This includes staff who are new to the school, so they are aware of their responsibilities from day one. Training on the safe recruitment of staff has been completed by senior leaders and a governor.

The vast majority of parents agree that pupils are safe, well cared for and that their individual needs are well met. A small minority of parents suggested that pupils were not always safe, but inspectors found no evidence to support this point of view. Every pupil spoken to said they felt very safe and were well looked after. They are taught to keep themselves safe, for example through their work on e-safety, which informs them how to use the internet safely. This is a strong aspect of your work with pupils in keeping them safe.

Inspection findings

- Leadership roles are shared well between staff and team-working is very strong. Leaders have placed great emphasis on providing staff with opportunities to take on additional responsibilities so that they develop the skills needed to become future leaders. As well as having a firm commitment to relevant leadership training, staff complete projects within school which are planned to achieve ongoing school improvement. These projects help staff to practise and sharpen their leadership skills. Leaders have a clear

vision for the school and development planning is detailed, with many tasks planned to maintain or improve your existing high standards. We did discuss, however, how your development plans could be further improved, so that all targets for improvement are more clearly identified and can be more easily measured along the way.

- Governors are committed and ambitious for pupils. They receive up-to-date information from school leaders, which allows them to ask challenging questions in meetings, effectively holding leaders to account. They also have an in-depth knowledge of performance management procedures, which ensures that staff are also held to account for their performance. Targets set for staff are taken from the school development plan, which helps to ensure that plans for improvement are completed continuously. Governors are planning carefully to train existing colleagues to replace those in more senior positions who will soon be leaving. This is another example of the effectiveness of leaders in planning for the future and maintaining high standards, while dealing with ongoing changes which are bound to occur over time.
- Pupils' behaviour is a key strength. Pupils are polite and well-mannered and were keen to discuss their work and experiences with inspectors. They are only too keen to hold open a door for others and delighted in acting as tour guides if inspectors did not know the way to their next meeting. Expectations for behaviour are high around the school. Pupils told us that they understood that some pupils find it difficult to always behave well, but they feel that staff manage situations effectively when pupils misbehave. Staff are very well trained to deal with challenging behaviour. There are well-rehearsed strategies to prevent situations from escalating. Because individual pupils are known so well by staff, staff know how to deal with issues when they occasionally arise, calming situations down quickly and sensitively.
- Pupils and learners are prepared well for their next steps in life. Whether they are planning to move on to a higher educational setting, enter the world of work or become a successful and happy member of the community, pupils learn skills which will help them. For example, when they are ready, pupils learn how to travel independently, learning how to use public transport. They have many opportunities to engage with the local community, for example by completing local work experience placements regularly. They develop further skills in independence, not least through the annual residential trips and the activities completed when working towards the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils are proud to attend Clare Mount and are ambitious for the future. By recognising the success of their peers, whether through sporting triumphs, volunteering at major events or succeeding academically, pupils understand that they can look forward to a meaningful future.
- Your high expectations have meant that pupils' academic outcomes continue to improve. You have devised an effective system which allows you to keep a close eye on pupils' progress towards challenging targets in all subjects. The system shows that the vast majority of current pupils are making strong progress. Where progress is slower, you are quick to notice this and plans are put in place to ensure that pupils are supported to catch up. Records

show that there is an increasing number of pupils achieving GCSEs at the end of Year 11. This is widening the choices and options for your pupils when they are deciding what their futures might hold.

- Pupils' enjoyment of school is borne out by their excellent attendance. Compared to the attendance of similar schools nationally, your overall attendance is very high. There are also very few pupils who are persistently absent. You have an established system for attendance which allows you to quickly analyse where problems are arising. You are quick to recognise issues and act swiftly to get to the heart of problems so that issues are quickly resolved. We saw several case studies which showed how pupils with previously poor attendance had been supported to become regular attenders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school development plans set out more clearly what the intended targets for improvement are and how your success can be more easily measured along the way.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We had discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, a number of parents, the school improvement adviser, a range of teaching staff and several pupils.
- We observed lessons in all year groups, some of which were jointly observed with you.
- We sampled pupils' work in a range of subjects.
- We observed behaviour around the school, in lessons, at break and lunchtime.
- We considered responses to surveys from staff and parents.
- We scrutinised a wide range of management documentation provided by leaders, including that related to safeguarding, governance, school development plans and pupils' outcomes.