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26 July 2016

Mrs Debbie Thompson
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Dear Mrs Thompson

Short inspection of Valley School

Following my visit to the school on 6 July 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 February 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, ably supported by a strong and cohesive senior leadership team, have the highest ambitions for the learning and development of every pupil at the school. You have not been prepared to sit back and accept the status quo since the last inspection. A significant feature of the school is the relentless pursuit to improve, every day, the provision for the pupils.

The school is a purposeful, calm and happy place. Learning in each and every classroom is celebrated at every opportunity. Smiles are contagious as learning is enjoyed by everyone, including adults who show a great deal of pride when pupils make even the smallest of steps in their progress. As a result, pupils flourish from the moment they enter the school, making outstanding progress in all areas of the curriculum.

The areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. Teachers now use assessment information to very good effect to identify specific learning outcomes for pupils. Individual education plans detail exactly pupils' planned journeys towards reaching ambitious academic and social targets. Teachers ensure that they use this information to plan learning that precisely matches the

differing and complex needs of each pupil in their class.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is given the highest priority. Robust procedures and policies to help keep pupils safe are in place and fully understood by all. The school is proactive in ensuring that every aspect of safeguarding is excellent. Recent support work with another local special school has brought a further level of challenge and the sharing of expertise. Staff are very well trained in aspects such as personal care and the administration of medicines. Furthermore, each new member of staff completes an extensive 12-hour safeguarding training programme. All statutory checks have been undertaken to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is because they use a plethora of information to assess how well each and every child is achieving. They use this information with class teachers to precisely identify what is needed to improve. This information is then used to inform wider school improvements.
- Leaders use frequent checks on the quality of teaching to support and challenge staff to become even better. Senior leaders are a constant presence throughout the school; they keep their fingers on the pulse of everything that is going on. Leaders use their own expertise as experienced practitioners to provide clear guidance that, consequently, ensures that the quality of teaching throughout the school is excellent.
- Leaders' commitment to providing high-quality professional development for all staff contributes strongly to the excellent teaching and learning in the school. Training is matched closely to the individual needs of staff and the pupils with whom they work. Teaching assistants who were interviewed during the inspection stated that they are very well supported by the school to ensure that they have the skills to undertake their role.
- Governance of the school is strong. Governors have a wide range of relevant skills that they bring to bear in their roles. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use an array of information to hold leaders stringently to account for the impact of their actions.
- Teachers are highly skilled. They know the differing and often complex needs of each and every pupil in detail. Lessons are clearly structured to meet the needs of individual pupils. All staff are aware of each pupils' targets or behaviour support plans, and activities explicitly address these. This attention to detail ensures that pupils make the small and large steps that they need to move forward.
- Excellent relationships between staff and pupils have been carefully nurtured and underpin the strong progress that pupils make in each class.

Adults, for instance, understand the need to be patient and give pupils the time that is required to become involved in lessons and respond to questions.

- Adults are highly effective at supporting pupils to communicate through a wide range of strategies, such as using pictures or signing. Teachers and teaching assistants are adept at recognising and responding to pupils' subtle communications and, as a result, are highly successful in helping pupils to express their wishes and feelings.
- Teaching assistants play a key role in the excellent progress that pupils make at the school. They have the same high expectations and ambitions for the pupils as leaders and teachers. Communication and teamwork are key features of this outstanding school. In each classroom, teachers and teaching assistants are clear about their roles and, as a result, are able to dedicate their time to ensuring that every pupil makes the progress of which they are capable.
- The curriculum is broad and rich. Great care is given to ensure that pupils are enthused by their learning. Older pupils, for instance, developed their understanding of the concept of on and off through the use of a remotely controlled robot.
- Enrichment activities further add to pupils' broad range of experiences and learning. In the spring term, for instance, a number of pupils attended a four-day residential visit, where they took part in activities such as climbing, archery, canoeing and pottery.
- Adults celebrate success at every opportunity, acting as highly positive role models for the pupils. As a result, pupils encourage each other and revel in each other's achievements. One pupil, for example, was delighted when her classmate was able to successfully join in with a naming activity.
- A significant feature of teaching and learning in the school is the enjoyment that everyone gains from lessons. Classrooms echo with laughter, and adults and pupils alike wear smiles at every opportunity. It is clearly apparent that staff at all levels are extremely dedicated, contributing exceptionally well to pupils' well-being and personal development.
- The bright and welcoming school environment is very well planned to support pupils to develop both academically and physically. The well-resourced outdoor playground, for instance, allows pupils to develop their gross motor skills. During the inspection, pupils were observed skilfully riding tricycles and exploring the school grounds during lunchtime.
- No learning time is wasted throughout the day. Teachers and other adults exploit every opportunity to develop language and communication skills. During snack and lunchtime, for instance, adults engage pupils in wide-ranging social conversations.
- Excellent links with multi-disciplinary and external agencies, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and social care, ensure that specialist advice and support is provided to ensure that the physical, social and emotional well-being of pupils is exceptional.
- The inclusive nursery provision for mainstream children and children with special educational needs and/or disability reflects the strengths seen

elsewhere throughout the school. Adults are highly ambitious for all children and ensure that a rich menu of activities support all pupils to make very strong progress from their varied starting points.

- Those parents who spoke to inspectors or replied to the online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school. One comment, typical of many, stated: 'The Valley School provides a happy, caring, nurturing and stimulating environment'. Every parent who responded to the questionnaire stated that they would recommend the school to another parent.
- Leaders have made good use of the advice and support provided by the local authority. This has helped to further sharpen aspects such as the use of assessment data.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the equality policy, published on the school website, reflects the outstanding provision at the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the governing body, a small group of teaching assistants and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. Documents were scrutinised including the school development plan, safeguarding checks, minutes of meetings, and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors also visited each classroom with you and other senior leaders to observe learning. I also took account of the 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the 11 responses to the online staff questionnaire.