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Mrs Anne Gough
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Dear Mrs Gough

Short inspection of Royal School, Manchester

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2016 with Doreen Davenport, 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 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

You and your team have taken the school from strength to strength since the last inspection. You have worked with your colleagues in the trust to find innovative solutions to some of the challenges you have encountered over the past three years. Last year, you faced a high turnover of staff and found your school overly reliant on agency workers. Through the 'temporary to permanent' recruitment scheme, you have been able to appoint some highly skilled new members to the team. As a result, staffing has been stabilised.

Your school is a happy place to learn. Staff enjoy coming to work. We were struck by the warmth of the relationships between staff and pupils. Your team looks forward to the weekly 'wow' meetings, celebrating the successes not only of pupils but also of staff. Staff make sure that no opportunity is missed to celebrate pupils' achievements. A member of staff talked to me about how much she is looking forward to a pupil's upcoming annual review meeting and to be able to share his achievements. This 'dedication and commitment' is recognised by parents who appreciate that 'all staff want the child to achieve the best they can'.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to refine your approaches to

assessment. You have wasted no time in addressing this area for improvement. You have reviewed the assessments you undertake when a pupil joins your school, making sure you involve a wide range of professionals, including therapists, teachers and key workers. This multi-disciplinary approach, based on more objective assessments, has enabled you to set more appropriate targets for pupils. Right from the start, you set ambitious goals for each pupil, making sure that medium- and long-term targets help pupils achieve these goals. The carefully considered level of challenge that you now incorporate into each target is making a positive difference. Your youngest and oldest pupils, in particular, are reaping the benefits, making strong progress from their different starting points. You have introduced more rigorous moderation processes. While your staff now review all assessments internally, you also check the accuracy of your judgements through regular moderation meetings with colleagues from three local special schools. The planning for next steps in learning, coupled with earlier transition meetings when pupils move classes, mean that pupils' learning does not stall as a result of them revisiting learning unnecessarily. This ensures that all pupils continue to make rapid rates of progress.

You have very high expectations for your pupils and make sure that after every activity you identify the next steps for pupils' learning. However, these next steps are not assiduously followed up by staff, meaning that sometimes pupils' usually strong progress is slowed. Everyone knows the pupils they work with extremely well. Excellent communication between the range of professionals involved ensures that the quality of care for pupils is exceptional. Staff work well with their colleagues and value the contribution everyone has to make. While they share successes, they equally make sure that when there are challenges they provide support to each other.

Your staff are quite rightly proud to work at Royal School. However, none of you are complacent. You continually strive to improve the provision for your pupils. Governors are well informed about the work of the school. However, governors do not yet systematically seek the views of staff, pupils, parents and local authorities to further inform their view of how well the school is doing. In particular, governors do not give staff enough opportunities to share their ideas about how the school may further improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are highly vigilant. They know pupils exceptionally well and are knowledgeable about keeping pupils safe, so are quick to identify any concerns. Staff are well-informed about the school's systems and procedures so take appropriate and timely action. The trust makes sure that the safeguarding policy is up to date and reflects the most recent statutory guidance. Arrangements for safeguarding are consistent across the trust and there are secure and reliable lines of communication between all staff. The weekly meetings of all key safeguarding staff ensure that all referrals are meticulously tracked. The trust has developed a safeguarding improvement plan

which incorporates learning from reviews of recent cases. Thorough checks are carried out on all staff prior to taking up post at the school. Parents and staff are agreed that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- Staff have absolute confidence in you and the leadership team. Together, you are able to support and guide them, drawing on your wealth of experience and expertise. Your huge investment in training pays dividends. New staff talked to me about how the intensive induction programme is preparing them well for their roles in school. Attendance at highly specialist training makes sure that your more experienced staff continually develop their knowledge and skills. Staff told me that the training is 'amazing'. As a result, you continually refine and improve the quality of the provision you offer your pupils.
- Staff share leaders' ambitious vision for the school. They have embraced the recent changes to how their performance is judged. Staff value the opportunities for self-reflection, using tools such as video, to help identify how they can improve their practice. You make sure that performance targets are aligned to outcomes for pupils, so that there is a relentless focus on raising standards. As a result, your records confirm that the high quality of teaching has been maintained.
- Senior leaders have established an accurate view of the school's performance. You have set out an ambitious plan for improvement which you ensure is regularly reviewed. Already, many of the objectives you set yourselves have been achieved.
- You keep a close eye on the attainment and progress of all your pupils and this is making a positive difference. Despite the considerable challenges faced by your pupils, you expect every pupil to achieve their targets, so that they are all on track to achieve the ambitious goals you have set. Parents are positive about the 'huge improvements' in their children's physical and communication skills.
- You make good use of the additional funding for children looked after and pupils eligible for free school meals. Every last penny is wisely spent, to ensure these pupils have the additional support and resources they need. As a result, these pupils make strong progress from their different starting points.
- You and your team prioritise the development of positive links with parents and carers. Staff make sure that they regularly keep in touch, to share how well pupils are getting on in the school. Frequent phone calls, home-school logs and weekly emails let parents know how their child is getting on. Regular events such as the information café, the recent creative arts family day as well as the Facebook page make sure that parents feel fully involved in school life.
- You value parents as partners in their children's education. You actively seek parents' views when pupils join your school as well as at the annual review meetings. You encourage parents to visit school whenever they can. You take time to learn from them about their children, you encourage them to

borrow therapy equipment at the weekends and are starting to share online resources with parents so they can reinforce their child's learning at home.

- Despite the communication and language difficulties faced by many pupils, you ensure that you listen to their views. You continue to develop the use of assistive technology to help pupils share their likes and dislikes. Recently, the school council asked their peers for their food preferences. The school council shared their findings with the school cook who has made some changes to the menu as a result.
- Since the last inspection, you have further developed your curriculum. You use the information you gather when pupils join your school, as well as the long-term goals you set, to plan a personalised pathway for each pupil through your curriculum at each key stage. As pupils move through the school, the curriculum reflects the different priorities you have identified so that pupils are ready for the next stage. As a result, almost all of your pupils have successfully moved on to college over the past three years.
- Your recent appointments of an art specialist teacher and a 'musician in residence' have given pupils more opportunities to develop their creative and musical skills. During our visit, pupils were making scenery for their upcoming performance of Shakespeare's 'A midsummer night's dream' and using beaters to play a rhythm using the gamelan.
- The key to the success of your curriculum for your pupils are the meaningful, purposeful and enjoyable learning experiences. A group of pupils recently successfully completed their expeditions as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. During our visit, key stage 5 pupils planned, shopped for and prepared lunch for themselves and staff and key stage 4 pupils took part in vocational taster sessions, including cleaning.
- You set high expectations for your pupils' behaviour. When pupils join the school, staff make sure that they develop strategies to help pupils accept the boundaries which are in place. For example, staff have a range of prompts to help pupils who find transitions difficult. Your staff make a point of noticing, pointing out and praising good behaviour throughout the school day. While staff are firm in making sure pupils behave appropriately, including completing tasks, they do this skilfully, avoiding creating anxiety or distress.
- Staff feel that senior leaders look after both the pupils and their well-being. Staff receive intensive training so that they know how to help pupils to reduce worry and stress. There is a clear procedure following any incident to make sure that both staff and pupils are helped to calm down and reflect on what happened. Regular reviews of challenging behaviour are used to improve future practice. Consequently, the number and severity of incidents has reduced.
- Many of the pupils can only work in isolation when they join your school. However, you make sure that pupils take huge strides within a relatively short time, so that almost all pupils work and socialise alongside their peers. This is key in preparing pupils for when they leave your school. Parents shared with inspectors that they are delighted by how the school has given their children 'a real prospect of contributing in later life'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- more systematically seek the views of staff, pupils, parents and local authorities to further inform their view of how well the school is doing
- make sure that next steps in pupils' learning are assiduously followed up

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

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Prior to the inspection, I identified a number of lines of enquiry which informed the focus of the team's work in the school:

- How well do pupils achieve from their different starting points when they join the school?
- How accurate are the school's assessments of pupils' attainment and progress?
How well are the assessments used to plan the next steps in pupils' learning?
How well does the curriculum meet pupils' needs and ensure that they achieve the best possible outcomes?
- Have leaders and managers ensured that all staff, whatever their roles, have the skills and knowledge to enable them to meet the needs of the pupils they work with?
- Are the school's systems and procedures for keeping children safe and well cared for fit for purpose?
- How effectively does the school engage with and work in partnership with parents and carers?
- How well do leaders and managers incorporate the views of staff, parents, pupils and other agencies in to their self-evaluation and school improvement planning?
Do leaders listen and pay heed to any concerns and suggestions from these different groups?

During the inspection we met with you, the director of education, senior teachers, teaching and support staff, therapists, and the chair and a member of the governing body. We also spoke with representatives of local authorities who have placed pupils at your school. We considered 13 responses from parents to Ofsted's online

survey, Parent View, and spoke to parents. We met formally with two groups of staff and considered the 55 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. We spoke to pupils. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and talk to the staff who work with them. We also observed pupils at the beginning and end of the school day as well as during lunchtime. Two joint observations were conducted with members of the school senior leadership team. We looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. We conducted a full review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.