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Ms Josephine Chambers-Shirley
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Dear Ms Chambers-Shirley

Short inspection of Heaton School

Following my visit to the school on 1 December 2016 with Michelle Beard, 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your arrival in January 2015, you have brought sweeping changes across the school. You have restructured and expanded your leadership team and together you have reviewed and sharpened school systems. Consequently, the area for improvement identified at the last inspection has been tackled effectively. Staff are now more outward-looking and work collaboratively to raise and share their talents across the school. Staff trust your vision for the school and have keenly embraced effective change.

You have established an inclusive school where self-esteem and respect for others are fostered, where diversity and achievements are celebrated, and where there are equal opportunities for all. There is a real focus on preparing pupils for adulthood right from their arrival in Year 7. Staff are tuned in to pupils' needs and unique talents and work effectively with therapists to ensure that pupils' barriers to learning are overcome. Teachers work well with teaching assistants in lessons to tailor learning to individual pupils' needs, ensuring that pupils make small but significant steps in their progress. As a result, many pupils embark on successful learning journeys and blossom in their achievements by the time they reach Year 14.

You have ensured that the curriculum is wide ranging and sculpted around the needs of individuals, which ensures that pupils are engaged and excited to learn.

Pupils have opportunities to develop their self-esteem and confidence through participation in forest school, performing arts school productions and music therapy. You have ensured that special themed days are used to address religious education and develop pupils' understanding and tolerance of different cultures. For example, pupils were able to develop an awareness that people believe different things through learning about the Hindu Festival of Nine Lights. Pupils engage well in all activities and establish positive attitudes towards each other and staff. Staff work effectively and hold a strong belief that every pupil has unique talents to share and develop at school. Staff ensure that the school is a place of learning and fun, where pupils' lives are enriched and enhanced by active involvement in a stimulating, extended and creative curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that safeguarding is given the highest priority in this school. The safeguarding arrangements, including risk assessments, are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a good quality. There are effective communication systems at the school that enable rapid action to be taken whenever child protection issues arise. There are strong systems in place to make sure that staff and visitors are vetted to be able to work with pupils.

Staff safeguarding training is appropriately focused on the risks and safeguarding concerns that are most relevant to the needs of the pupils. Members of staff are vigilant in identifying any indicators of abuse, including those relating to child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Staff are aware that, although they work with pupils who have significant and complex needs, these pupils can still be affected by such issues.

Speech therapists have provided additional training on swallowing and choking to ensure that staff are alert and informed about dysphagia. Health care updates are frequent to ensure that all staff are well versed in their understanding and responsibilities and are clear on new guidelines and legislation.

Inspection findings

- Leaders ensure that assessments are rigorously and frequently implemented across the curriculum to establish the depth of pupils' understanding. Staff are provided with time to collaborate with others and build on their understanding of assessment across the school. They moderate work frequently to secure the accuracy of their judgements regarding pupils' developments. Leaders have implemented sharper systems to track and monitor the small steps in pupils' progress. Leaders have ensured that teachers are well trained on the new assessment systems. However, they will need to ensure that this training is cascaded to teaching assistants and that it is closely monitored to ensure its effectiveness in raising standards across the school.
- Teachers' performance is reviewed appropriately by senior leaders to drive up standards. Systems are poised for evaluating the performance of teaching assistants across the school. However, there is limited evidence so far on how

these new systems are raising standards across the school.

- Leaders keenly ensure that reading is developed across the school. Pupils with limited reading skills are taught to recognise common symbols and words so they are prepared for life beyond school. The few pupils who can develop their reading follow well-organised individual reading support plans and make strong progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils supported by additional funding make the same progress as their peers and better progress at key stage 3 than their classmates. Leaders ensure that they use the additional funding effectively to provide well-focused additional support and therapies which successfully help their learning and behaviour. No meaningful comparison is possible between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils and pupils nationally.
- Pupils make strong progress from their starting points. There are no significant differences in the achievement of pupils from different backgrounds, or other groups of special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The 16 to 19 provision provides students with excellent opportunities to prepare for the next stages of their education or care. Staff work hard to ensure that all students achieve a range of Level 1 accreditations. A number of students also achieve the challenging and highly regarded Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Leaders ensure that students experience travel training and focus on sharpening skills through employability sessions. A work experience programme is in place, which gives some students the chance to gather information about the world of work and further develop their independent skills. Students are encouraged to be increasingly independent throughout their time in school. For example, students are empowered to organise a range of mini enterprise activities to raise funds for their own end-of-year prom. All students leave school to attend a range of providers related to education and care. These next steps are personalised to the needs of the individual students.
- Pupils benefit from the broad range of therapy organised by the school. As a result, pupils' academic, personal and physical development is well supported because they are given the skills to overcome their very specific difficulties. I observed excited pupils engaging in a music therapy lesson, with staff tailoring motor challenges, strength and coordination to match pupils' needs and requirements. As a result, all pupils made progress, shook instruments with delight and left the session invigorated and ready for their next challenge. However, rising numbers of pupils entering the school are stretching current facilities and resources. Governors and leaders are working closely with the local authority to discuss improvements in funding for resources and facilities that can support the demands of rising pupil numbers.
- Pupils' behaviour in and around school is well controlled. Pupils who are known to have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time are brought back on track swiftly by well-trained staff. Leaders ensure that staffing levels are aligned with pupils' needs. Pupils' good behaviour contributes significantly to their progress.
- Staff are committed to empowering pupils and ensure that the school council is well established and helps pupils to have a greater say over matters that affect

their school and wider lives. Consequently, pupils play an active role in making their school a better place and develop their own life skills through this participation.

- Governors have a strong sense of commitment and are striving to further improve the quality of education available to pupils and students at the school. Governors are a loyal, cohesive working group who use their plethora of skills to challenge and support the school well. They have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governing body committees have been reorganised to provide a platform to question impact and hold leaders to account. Governors have ensured that the school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Parents and carers cannot praise the school highly enough. There is a sense of overwhelming support for staff, the work the school does and its impact on pupils' progress. They consider the school to be well led and that their children are very well looked after. There were several positive comments on Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View about the work of the school. For example: 'As my child's confidence has increased, his anxiety and behaviours have improved. This is due to the way the teachers at this school work with individual students.' 'Staff are passionate, they all know my child really well.' 'All the teaching is done with understanding of the children as individuals... The head and deputies are extremely approachable and dedicated to the welfare of the children.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new tracking and assessment system is fully implemented and its effectiveness closely monitored
- systems are in place for evaluating the performance of teaching assistants and their impact on raising standards across the school
- resources to support pupils' personal development and achievement are enriched so that they can effectively support the rising number of pupils entering 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

Dawn Platt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings took place with you, your senior leaders, members of the governing body, members of staff and a parent. Inspectors also met with a local authority adviser linked to the school and members of the school council.
- Inspectors made short visits to a number of lessons to observe teaching and look at pupils' learning development. In most of these visits inspectors were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons, around school and at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance, and information relating to pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account eight responses from parents on Ofsted's free text service. They also considered six responses to the online staff questionnaire.
- This inspection particularly focused on a number of key questions:
 - Are facilities, resources and therapists supporting the needs of all pupils and ensuring outstanding pupils' developments and achievements?
 - Are governors challenging and highly skilled, ensuring that they meet all statutory regulations in the promotion of materials on the school website?
 - Are pupils continuing to make strong progress across the school in their learning and development?
 - Is the Extended Education Department (post-16) continuing to provide students with clear aspirations, accreditations and where appropriate employability skills to allow students to take positive next steps in their lives?
 - Have leaders ensured that staff are provided with moderation opportunities to secure accurate judgements on pupils' achievements in school?
 - Are all staff knowledgeable and do they liaise appropriately together, and with others, to ensure that pupils are effectively safeguarded within and beyond school?