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Mrs Janice Cahill
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Janice Cahill

Short inspection of The Pendlebury Centre

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2017 with Maggie Parker, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

There has not been a moment, since the previous inspection, when you have 'rested on your laurels'. You acted swiftly on the findings of the inspectors, putting a more effective leadership structure in place. Your senior and middle leaders relish their roles and responsibilities. The considerable contribution made by these leaders has enabled you to take the school from strength to strength.

Your pupils and their families are in no doubt that your school transforms lives. For many pupils and their families, your school was their last hope. Parents talked to inspectors about the positive difference you make, not only to their children but to the families too. Parents and pupils appreciate the way that you and your staff recognise the potential of pupils and nurture their talents and interests. Your ambition for your pupils is infectious. Pupils talked to inspectors about their plans for the future, which include applying for university, joining the armed forces and pursuing a career in childcare.

Your staff are proud to work at The Pendlebury Centre. Staff have absolute confidence in you and the leadership team. Despite the demands of your job, they admire your willingness to roll your sleeves up and work alongside them. They describe how you are often the one to comfort a pupil who is in crisis. This

approach sets the tone for the rest of the staff, who talk in glowing terms of how well the members of the team work together. This has a very positive impact on the well-being of pupils in your care.

You recognise the valuable contribution that every member of staff makes, regardless of their position. You have particularly developed the role of your teaching assistants since the previous inspection. These staff are now making a significant contribution to teaching and learning across the school.

You never let 'the grass grow under your feet'. You keep up to date with the latest research findings and make sure that the school is at the cutting edge in its field of work. Your relentless pursuit for excellence is shared by your team. Staff delight in the opportunities to work alongside colleagues in mainstream schools to develop their subject knowledge. They also benefit from training to understand and support the range of special educational and medical needs your pupils present with. The Pendlebury Centre is held in high esteem by senior leaders in local schools. They cite the phenomenal success you have in supporting their most vulnerable pupils. These senior leaders value the support you give not only to pupils, but also to their school staff through the regular 'checkpoint' surgeries, when you share your expertise willingly with them.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to provide more time and resources to your middle leaders. In the restructure, you clearly defined middle leaders' roles and responsibilities. You make sure that they have not only the time but also the training and support that they need to do a good job. Their colleagues talk enthusiastically of the positive impact these leaders are making to the overall effectiveness of the school. For example, they have improved the quality of feedback given to pupils about their work and developed new ways of supporting pupils in Year 10.

The English and mathematics subject leaders have provided training and support for their colleagues, who speak enthusiastically about their increased levels of confidence in teaching these subjects. This has secured the consistency that inspectors felt was lacking at the previous inspection.

In respect of the second area for improvement highlighted by inspectors around increasing pupils' progress, you have had real success. You make sure that you gather a wealth of information about each pupil when they join your school. Teachers use this information well to plan lessons. All staff have high aspirations and expectations for every pupil, making sure that not a moment is wasted in lessons. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their different starting points and achieve both personal and academic success which amazes their mainstream schools and parents.

You have developed a suite of assessments to provide you with the wealth of information you need to inform pupils' learning plans. You quite rightly recognise that you need to develop an approach which allows you to accurately measure pupils' attainment and progress directly in relation to your curriculum.

Furthermore, you are mindful that although your new leaders have got off to a flying start, it is important to make sure that they continue to receive training and support. You recognise they have a key role to play in your ambitious plans for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of vigilance pervades every aspect of the school. You provide a haven for the pupils who attend your school. You manage pupils' anxieties well, listening carefully to pupils' concerns and putting strategies in place to overcome these. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying. You and your staff build excellent relationships with pupils so that you gain their confidence and trust quickly. You provide pupils with the information they need to understand and manage risks, both online and in the community. Staff work in partnership with other agencies to provide the range of support needed by pupils and their families. As a result, parents see the transformation in their children. Staff keep up to date with their training and are familiar with the school's safeguarding policy and procedures. You leave nothing to chance. Thorough checks are carried out before new staff take up post. Risk assessments carried out for trips and visits are comprehensive and child protection records are kept meticulously.

Inspection findings

- The governing body have stepped up to the mark. They are honest about the difficult task they have had, to provide effective support and challenge to a headteacher who is always one step ahead. However, governors' perseverance has paid off. Governing body meetings are productive. The regular professional dialogue, informed by the skills, experience and expertise of the governors, has provided the checks and balances to make sure that all aspects of the school's work are equally strong.
- Pupils make outstanding progress from their different starting points. The vast majority of younger pupils return to their mainstream school successfully. Most pupils achieve this within a relatively short amount of time. Without exception, older pupils move on to education, employment and training when they leave school.
- Many pupils have had prolonged periods of absence prior to joining the school. The overwhelming majority of pupils quickly increase their engagement in education and value their time at the school. One parent told inspectors, 'Now there is not a day that ... does not want to come to school'. Other parents described to inspectors how children, who previously would not leave their bedrooms, now take part in family life, attend school regularly and are talking about their future academic plans.
- Pupils respond well to the calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school. They appreciate the time staff take to get to know them. They value the support they receive when things are not going well for them. You make sure that there is a wealth of opportunities woven into the curriculum to help your pupils address their individual needs, including art and drama therapy.
- You have revised your curriculum offer since the previous inspection. You and

your staff have evaluated the benefits of different courses for the older pupils. Year 11 pupils talked effusively to inspectors about the benefits of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. They described how the different challenges are helping them to conquer some of their fears, as well as helping them to learn skills which will stand them in good stead for their next steps.

- You turn every challenge into an opportunity. The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is given to their mainstream schools. You make sure that pupils continue to benefit from this funding during their time in your school. In every pupil's learning plan, you identify how this funding will be used by the schools to complement what The Pendlebury Centre can offer pupils. As a result, the mainstream schools fund whatever is needed to make sure that each pupil can achieve their full potential. For example, mainstream schools have used the pupil premium funding recently for vocational training, music lessons, transport to school and work experience placements. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils achieve well from their different starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to provide support and training to middle leaders so that they continue to make a valuable contribution to school improvement
- implement an approach to assessment which enables teachers to accurately measure pupils' attainment and progress in relation to the school's academic curriculum.

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

During the inspection we met with you, senior leaders, teaching and support staff, the vice chair and members of the governing body. We also spoke with a representative of the local authority. We considered the six responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to parents. We met formally with a group of staff and considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. We met formally with a group of pupils. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and to talk to pupils and the staff who work with them. We also observed pupils during breaktime and lunchtime. 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.