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Mrs Kate Connolly
Headteacher
Rochdale Pupil Referral Service
Year 11 Centre
Samson Street
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Dear Mrs Connolly

Short inspection of Rochdale Pupil Referral Service

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Ann Gill, 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 good in November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. At the previous inspection, the 'loose federation' between Brownhill School and Rochdale Pupil Referral Unit was developing. The two schools now work together as the Brownhill Learning Community. This means that although each school retains its separate official identity, in every other aspect they now work as one school. In this letter, I use the term 'school' to refer to Rochdale Pupil Referral Unit.

You have taken the school from strength to strength since the previous inspection. You tailor your provision in response to the needs of your community. Consequently, Brownhill Learning Community plays a key role in the local authority offer for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Senior leaders in local schools appreciate the positive difference you make to the pupils they refer to your school.

You are ably supported by your deputy headteachers, who manage the different sites day to day.

Your pupils are left in no doubt that this is a school and they are with you to learn. You and your staff go the extra mile every day to build positive relationships with your pupils. These relationships are key to your success in re-engaging pupils with their education. Consequently, the majority of pupils improve their attendance,

regulate their behaviour better and start to catch up with their work.

You and your senior leaders have the support of the staff, who are proud to work at the school. They overwhelmingly agree that the school is well led and managed and has improved since the previous inspection. Staff appreciate the support you give them and appreciate the way in which you look after their well-being. As a result, they enjoy coming to work. Most remain working at the school for a long time.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to strengthen the overall quality of teaching. First, you made sure that teachers had consistently high expectations for pupils' work across the school. You and your staff reviewed samples of pupils' work and agreed the minimum standards that you expect. You also developed a consistent approach to marking pupils' work, making sure that pupils are left in no doubt about what they need to do to improve. Since then, you have carried out regular work scrutinies to make sure that staff adhere to the school's agreed policies.

The inspectors also asked you to identify and record pupils' progress in English and mathematics, to help you plan the next steps for pupils. You have implemented a new approach to assessment since the previous inspection. You make sure that you identify pupils' starting points accurately in English and mathematics when they join the school. You have clear expectations, understood by all staff, for the progress that you expect every pupil to make, regardless of how long they stay at the school. You have made sure that your assessments link closely to the programmes of study you have devised, so that teachers can readily identify the next steps in pupils' learning.

You have invited your local authority school improvement officer, as well as senior colleagues from local schools, to help you sharpen up your monitoring of teaching and learning. The half-termly reports on pupils' performance in each of the centres provides you with an overview of pupils' progress across the school. The deputy headteachers keep a close eye on patterns and trends in their centres. You have made sure that plans are put in place to support teachers if required. You and the other senior leaders have recognised that you need to develop the skills of middle leaders further, to review the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects across the school.

You have identified the key priorities for the school over the next three years. However, you have not put these priorities into a plan quickly enough.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff are tenacious in your determination to keep pupils safe. You make sure that checks on new staff are thorough. Staff keep up to date with their training and are familiar with the school's procedures for raising any concerns. The new welfare team is an asset to the school. The team's skills, experience and expertise help them to manage the numerous, complex cases they deal with day to day. Their record-keeping is meticulous. Pupils regard your school as a haven; they

feel safe and well cared for within the school's four walls. Although you have a wealth of expertise among your own staff, you also work in partnership with the police and other agencies to make sure that pupils and their families get the help they need.

Inspection findings

- You and your colleagues ensure that you gather information about pupils when they join the school. You use this information well to determine and address the key barriers to academic success for each pupil. As a result, a number of pupils are very quickly ready to return to mainstream schooling.
- Almost all the pupils who join your school have experienced considerable disruption to their education. At the Year 11 Centre, staff are relentless in their drive to ensure that pupils move on to education, employment or training. The team's pragmatic approach to making sure that pupils gain the qualifications they need to secure a place at college pays dividends. The vast majority of your pupils move on to post-16 provision successfully.
- You make good use of the opportunities created through the federation between Brownhill School and Rochdale Pupil Referral Unit. For example, by combining the two cohorts of Year 11 pupils, you have been able to offer a broader and more balanced curriculum. Pupils can now work towards a wide range of nationally recognised qualifications, as well as gain workplace experience. This stands them in good stead to gain a place at college on a course of their choice.
- Governors make sure that they are well informed about the work of the Brownhill Learning Community and keep a close eye on how well pupils are getting on. However, the current way of working presents a challenge for you and your management committee when they are held to account for the effectiveness of the Rochdale Pupil Referral Unit as a separate entity to Brownhill School.
- Members of the management committee visit the different school sites regularly, talking to pupils, parents and staff. Members seek advice from local authority school improvement officers to help them carry out their duties, including the performance management of the headteacher. However, members do not always act promptly on the actions that they agree at their meetings. Moreover, the agendas the committee set do not ensure that enough time is given to reviewing the impact of its decisions on pupils.
- You make sure that additional funding for physical education and sports for primary pupils is used well. Pupils at the Darnhill site enjoy playing lacrosse at breaktimes. Moreover, a number of pupils regularly attend the football club you have set up.
- You make good use of the additional special educational needs funding. You provide bespoke packages of support to your pupils to address their diverse range of needs. Many of your pupils have needs which had not been identified prior to joining your school. Many of these pupils improve their attendance, behaviour and academic progress within a relatively short time from starting at your school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should set out their priorities for school improvement in an effective plan, making sure that they review the impact of the agreed actions on outcomes for pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Rochdale. 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 teachers, teaching and support staff. An inspector met the chair and two members of the management committee. We also spoke with representatives of the local authority. Inspectors visited the school's three sites: Year 11 Centre, Heights Lane and Darnhill. Only one parent responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, so inspectors considered the school's own survey of parents as well as a sample of letters sent by parents to the school. We met formally with a group of staff and considered the 70 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. We spoke to pupils and considered the seven responses to Ofsted's online survey of pupils. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning. We also observed pupils around the different sites during the school day. We made visits to classrooms with senior leaders. 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.