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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Tricia Head
Headteacher
The Danesgate Community
Danesgate
Fulford Cross
York
North Yorkshire
YO10 4PB

Dear Mrs Head

Short inspection of The Danesgate Community

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 2017 with Peter McKenzie, 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 good in November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have continued to develop the complex provision of The Danesgate Community, supported by your effective leadership team. This is leading to increasingly better outcomes for vulnerable young people. All of the pupils have experienced disruption in their lives and education. For the majority of pupils, the disruption is not of their own making but due to unidentified or unmet social and emotional mental health or specific learning needs. You ensure that all staff have good knowledge and understanding of how to support pupils' emotional well-being and personal development. Crucially, you and the staff know that this is not all the pupils need. You are equally skilled in giving pupils a good chance to achieve GCSEs and other recognised qualifications. Backed up by sound careers advice and guidance, improved emotional well-being and qualifications give pupils an opportunity to move onto a meaningful adult life.

Since the last inspection, the proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five A* to G GCSEs over a range of subjects has increased to 70%. This figure reaches 76% of the pupils who were placed with you for at least two terms before taking the examinations. Importantly, the proportion of pupils who go on to continue their education and/or training rose to 89% of the 2016 cohort.

During our joint visits to lessons, I was able to see how staff use the wide range of assessment information you have about each pupil to plan lessons. This key aspect

of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is contributing to the better outcomes for pupils. Additionally, I checked out the opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across a range of subjects. The work in pupils' books and folders gives a clear indication that much progress has been made in this area. I was particularly impressed by extended writing completed as geography homework. You recognise that despite improvements there is still more to be done to increase the rate of progress pupils make in writing. Your development plan addresses the need for more pupils to make rapid gains so they meet the standards expected for their age and the demands of the reformed GCSEs.

Pupils know they learn well at Danesgate due to the calm environment and because staff listen to them and understand and respect them. They really appreciate their key workers, with whom they build trusting relationships. This trust enables key workers to help pupils come to terms with some of the difficulties life has thrown at them. They also appreciate the staff's diligent observations of pupils who might be getting close to an emotional meltdown, because this means pupils get the right support, quickly enough, before serious incidents happen.

Parents are positive about the difference they see in their children because of the staff's work under your leadership. The local authority hold the school in high regard because of your flexibility and commitment to giving pupils a chance to succeed when others have failed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the staff team are well trained in different aspects of safeguarding and you ensure that staff use their knowledge well. A significant proportion of pupils receive support from different services, including social care and the local child and adolescent mental health service. Key workers contribute to this essential work through their detailed and up-to-date knowledge of the pupils' attendance and progress, alongside aspects of the pupils' lives outside of school. Key workers keep detailed records about each pupil, called case studies. These records are used to inform the decisions multi-agency teams make about how best to keep individual pupils safe.

All staff are keenly aware of their responsibility for pupils' safety and welfare while at school and the need to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe from different risks. Most pupils' self-esteem and resilience develops because of the strategies staff use to engage pupils in learning. These key personal skills reduce the amount of risky decisions pupils make, for example being confident enough to avoid being drawn into unhealthy online so-called friendships.

The record of the checks you make on the suitability of staff did not follow statutory guidance at the start of the inspection. However, you ensured that this was rectified within the day.

Inspection findings

- I could see from the school's website the improved GCSE and other examination results. However, I wanted to make sure this represented good progress for pupils from their different starting points, and for all groups of pupils, including the most able and the disadvantaged. You and the assistant headteacher demonstrated how you plan for pupils to make progress from their last set of standard tests. You also factor in the impact of the disruption to their education before they are placed with you. The information you presented, backed up by the work in pupils' books, show that you aspire for the pupils to make rapid progress so they make up for the time they have lost.
- I was keen to make sure that you made effective provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. When pupils start at Danesgate, they are assessed to see if they have any specific learning difficulties. If needed, further diagnostic tests and assessments are completed. This allows you to identify a significant proportion of pupils' specific learning needs that have previously gone unrecognised. Teachers use the information wisely to inform their planning and consequently pupils make strong progress. Just under half of the pupils in this group make more than expected progress over a 12-month period particularly in reading.
- Danesgate offers a range of different opportunities for pupils, including personalised programmes. These programmes are taught mainly on a one-to-one basis. This approach not only supports strong academic progress but also helps these pupils develop socially and emotionally. As a result, many develop the skills they need to work alongside, and with, other pupils for part of their weekly programme. This represents a significant improvement for those pupils who have previously been unable to attend school at all due to a range of complex issues.
- I was also keen to check out how well you managed the different sites pupils attend as part of their individual timetables. An inspector visited three providers and two community centres used for some one-to-one teaching sessions. It is clear you make thorough checks to ensure the safety and welfare of these pupils. Equally, you make sure pupils make good progress in the site-specific activity and progress in English and mathematics. Older pupils can attend a range of providers and this supports their decision-making about their next steps in education and training. The work-related element gives the pupils a realistic picture of a range of career options, including the boring but necessary 'sweeping up at the end' jobs.
- We looked in depth at how you currently support pupils to attend more often. Through individual pupils' records, it is clear that for many pupils, their attendance improves dramatically when placed with you. However, even with significant improvement, sometimes from refusal to engage with any form of education, attendance remains below 90% for the majority of pupils. You have identified that more needs to be done to improve attendance. However, you do not analyse the information you have about the effectiveness of the different strategies you use to improve attendance in relation to pupils with different needs and difficulties. The lack of analysis hinders how precisely you match your

approaches to different pupils achieving better attendance.

- The management committee members are partners in your ambition for the school's future development and are working with you on plans to join a multi-academy trust and proposals to open a free school. They know the school well and share your accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of the different programmes you offer. Crucially, they understand the pupils' views because they listen to what the pupils have to say during their many visits to the school. They keep a keen eye on the school's finances and, with you, ensure that specific grants are used for the purposes for which they are intended. They are also diligent in checking the recommendations you provide about staff pay progression. Unfortunately, they had overlooked the detail of the statutory guidance regarding the record of checks on the suitability of staff.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they are meticulous in checking they meet the detail of statutory requirements, particularly about recording checks made on the suitability of staff
- the effectiveness of different approaches to improving pupils' attendance is analysed forensically and the results used to inform future developments.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Hayter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We visited a range of group and one-to-one lessons, during which I talked with pupils, heard them read and looked at work in their books. My colleague visited five of the eight different sites pupils attend for different programmes, talking with pupils and staff, and reviewing pupils' work.

Meetings were held with staff who are responsible for different aspects of the school's work. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the management committee and one other member. I also met with a representative of the local authority.

I considered six written responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and met with one parent.

I also reviewed a range of documents and records relating to all aspects of the school's work.