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Mrs Lesley Sullivan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Sullivan

### **Short inspection of Kirkham Pear Tree School**

Following my visit on 14 June 2017 with Michelle Beard HMI, 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 May 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 senior leadership team's strong and passionate leadership provides a clear direction for the school, which you have shared effectively with staff and governors. You and your staff have immense pride in the school and an unquestionable commitment to providing the very best for the young people who attend it. The school is a learning community that provides excellent education and care for its pupils. Parents overwhelmingly support the school and recognise the impact of the high-quality teaching that your leadership has ensured. This is typified by a comment received through Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, in which a parent stated, 'Pear Tree have transformed [pupil's name]'s life and provided her with opportunities we never imagined she would have.'

Governors and staff share your high expectations and together you have addressed the area for improvement identified at the last inspection. This related to the further development of assessment procedures for monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Your carefully considered actions have resulted in a highly effective internal assessment system. It is used consistently by teachers and teaching assistants across the school to capture the often exceptionally small steps of progress made by pupils against well-defined and appropriate individual expectations. You and your senior leaders' frequent monitoring and detailed analysis of this information ensure that you have a detailed

understanding of the progress made by each pupil, by each different cohort and each group of pupils. You and your teachers use this information exceptionally well to identify clearly the next appropriate step that pupils need to achieve.

Your leadership has ensured that the school has established many highly effective partnerships with medical and educational professionals that have resulted in your staff developing a deep knowledge and understanding of many aspects and strategies related to the teaching of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. You make excellent use of this key strength of the school to support some other schools in meeting the needs of their pupils. However, you recognise that the school could enhance further this area of work to have even greater positive impact in the wider educational community.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are followed closely. Documentation relating to safeguarding and the welfare of pupils is kept meticulously. Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with children. Appropriate training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about the potential risks that pupils may face. Leaders make excellent use of the professional knowledge of the school's medical staff to ensure that all staff are well trained to support the pupils in their care. They share information with parents and appropriate authorities effectively to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders follow up any absences rigorously to provide excellent support to families in providing opportunities for pupils to learn while they are unable to attend school.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your senior leadership team have a detailed understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in school because of the exceptional depth and rigour of your monitoring and analysis. Your innovative development of specific tracking systems for your school's context has ensured that you have a deep understanding of the progress that pupils make over time. These systems include a recently developed sixth-form assessment system that ensures that all aspects of a student's development are carefully evaluated, including those relating to their social and physical development.
- Governors have a detailed and deep understanding of the school because of the high quality of information that they receive from you, your staff and other educational and medical professionals. Governors frequently check the accuracy of the information they receive by visiting the school and asking incisive questions. Governors share leaders' high expectations. They undertake an annual skills audit and use its outcomes effectively to identify appropriate additional training and to inform any recruitment or development decisions.
- The quality of teaching remains a significant strength of the school. High-quality training, often in partnership with specialist professionals such as medical practitioners, clinical psychologists and a sensory processing consultant, ensures that staff keep up to date and extend their skills and knowledge of strategies to

support the development of pupils with complex and profound needs.

- Teachers manage the high numbers of teaching assistants working in their classes highly effectively to provide excellent support for individual pupils' needs. Teaching assistants are well trained, highly committed and skilled practitioners who use their specialist knowledge effectively to support and nurture pupils' development. Teachers and other adults consistently promote learning and development through their enthusiasm and through carefully designed activities, which makes learning fun and accessible to all. Teachers have high expectations of pupils from early years to sixth form. Teachers use their assessments exceedingly well to evaluate the progress that pupils make to inform their planning, even though this can be in extremely small steps. Well-established and effective strategies are in place to share teachers' assessments and observations with parents and ensure that they are well informed about their child's development or of any concerns.
- Teaching in the early years is strong. The teacher and teaching assistants have consistently high expectations and provide children with engaging and fun learning activities that are appropriate to their age and stage of development. Consequently, children love to learn in their well-organised, bright and stimulating environment. The teachers and teaching assistants use their expertise well to provide highly effective early help and specialist support for other schools and settings through a small number of 'seedling' places that allow children to attend the early years class for a limited time.
- Teaching in the sixth form is highly effective and strongly develops students' independence through appropriate activities that prepare them well for the transition into adult life and provide them with accredited qualifications. These activities include attendance at a range of local college courses that help students develop their confidence to work safely with other adults in unfamiliar situations. All members of staff have high expectations, expert knowledge and excellent relationships with students. Adults provide appropriate challenge and support that develop students' confidence and skills for adult life effectively. For example, in one lesson, students who had been learning about giving reasons for choices confidently self-evaluated their progress and gave reasons for their decisions, including identifying what they would work on next to be even better.
- The Compass Centre, a new provision developed in partnership with the local authority to support pupils with complex needs and challenging behaviour, is a real asset to the school and the wider community. It has an immensely positive impact on the development and learning of pupils because of the quality of leadership and teaching they receive. In the short time it has been running, it has already had a significant impact on the lives of some of the young people who attend. It has helped some pupils to overcome their anxieties and modify their behaviours to engage in learning and develop communication strategies that will help them in their adult life.
- You have established an expectation of attendance within the ethos of the school and monitor pupils' attendance meticulously. As a result, you are aware that although pupils' attendance is below the average for mainstream schools nationally, it is well above the average for special schools nationally. You are also

aware that the rates of persistent absence in the school are much lower than the national average for special schools. Pupils are typically unable to attend for good reasons, often linked to their medical needs, special needs and/or disabilities. When pupils are unable to attend for any extended period, they continue to receive access to high-quality education because you provide appropriate support from teachers and teaching assistants in pupils' homes, hospitals and hospices. Additionally, you ensure that, where appropriate, members of pupils' families and other professionals working with them receive support and high-quality training in appropriate strategies from school staff. This allows them to continue to support their children's learning and development, even though they are not in school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- consider how best to enhance the use of the high levels of expertise and specialist knowledge found in school to provide the best training and support to other educational establishments and the wider educational community.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, teachers and support staff. I also met with governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with the local authority adviser who works with the school. Inspectors spoke with some pupils during lessons and around the school. We took account of the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents, Parent View, and staff. There were no responses to the pupils' questionnaire.

Inspectors visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in profiles. We reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. We scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document, action plans and other policies. We looked at safeguarding, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep children safe, recruitment checks and record-keeping.