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Mrs Kairen Dexter
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dexter

Short inspection of Bleasdale School

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 2017 with Bernard Robinson, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Your leadership has ensured that the school continues to build upon its strengths. You have inspired your staff to believe that education, as well as care, should be at the heart of what they do on behalf of the pupils. With the strong support of governors, you have overseen many changes since the last inspection. These have included an increase in pupil numbers, the recruitment of new staff and a restructuring of your leadership team. There has also been an overhaul of how the school and residential staff plan and work collaboratively on behalf of young people. You have overseen significant changes in the use of the premises and accommodation. Your creativity has opened up the school and residential sites to wider and more effective use, ensuring that pupils benefit from an enriching and stimulating curriculum. The school is now an integral part of the local community.

Senior leaders and governors have a school development plan that is costed out with clear, planned actions. Leaders have ensured that teachers and support staff consider pupils' individual needs and abilities fully when planning their lessons. Staff adhere well to the agreed curriculum policy, so that there is a continued focus on the development of pupils' speech, communication and independence skills. There is high-quality teaching, learning and assessment across the school, including in the early years class and in the 16–19 department.

Partnership working is a great strength of the school's work. Parents spoken to said that communication systems are strong. They feel valued as partners in the school community. There are strong links with local primary and secondary schools, for example when pupils work together in 'Forest Schools' lessons. School staff work well in partnership with the residential staff to extend learning opportunities after school hours. The school also works collaboratively with other special schools. Teachers share effective practice in assessing pupils' abilities, setting challenging targets and checking on pupils' progress. Your newly appointed deputy headteacher is a specialist teacher who provides training for local schools and colleges. Leaders plan to build upon strong partnership working with parents to ensure that they reinforce their children's learning and independence at home.

Pupils behave well in different contexts. They settle well in lessons because of the sensitive and intuitive teaching and support provided by caring staff. There are high expectations for all pupils to develop their skills and abilities, mostly from extremely low starting points. There are occasions when subject teachers could consider even smaller steps of learning in line with approaches already in place for physical and sensory development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that agreed safeguarding policies and procedures are followed consistently by all staff. Governors conduct termly checks when looking at the suitability of staff working at the school. All staff and governors receive updated training, for example 'Prevent' duty and keeping safe online. In this way, key personnel are kept aware of how to ensure that they keep pupils safe.

Fire drills are completed efficiently and effectively. Evacuations are timed and there have been improvements in each subsequent fire drill.

In the early years class, staff follow agreed safeguarding procedures in keeping children safe. Appropriate risk assessments are in place when learners in the 16–19 department go off site, for example when attending work experience placements.

The premises are secure and visitors are checked on arrival through an electronic system. Pupils' education, health and care plans take full account of any safeguarding or child protection issues by informing teaching and support both in and out of school.

Inspection findings

- School development planning is rigorous, with clear action plans. Leaders have ensured that issues from the last inspection report have been addressed fully. For example, there are strong systems in place for assessing pupils' learning, behaviour, personal, social, physical, sensory, speech and communication needs. Teachers make very effective use of this information to inform their lesson planning, particularly in terms of pupils' sensory and physical development.

- Governors are knowledgeable about the school's work. They benefit from verbal and written presentations from leaders, for example about pupil progress. Governors pose challenging questions during full governing body and committee meetings. They hold staff to account through rigorous performance management systems.
- You ensure that the local authority is fully aware of your school development plans. The local authority improvement partner has provided helpful support in achieving a number of changes since the last inspection. Your school receives light-touch support and is highly regarded in terms of the outstanding practice it can share with other providers.
- You have deployed staff to make consistent checks on pupils' attendance and welfare, particularly children looked after. Case studies demonstrate high-quality support and interventions on behalf of vulnerable pupils to effect improvements in attendance and engagement in school life. Overall, attendance levels are in line with other special schools nationally. In the 16–19 department, there is almost full overall attendance. Behaviour is managed exceptionally well. There has been a continued reduction in incidents requiring physical intervention.
- Leaders have established outstanding tracking and monitoring systems to check on pupil progress and outcomes. They have kept up to date with current thinking, sharing effective practice with colleagues in other special schools in the local authority.
- Teachers and support staff work together extremely well. They ensure that classrooms are welcoming to pupils. Staff are wonderfully creative when using signing, visual and auditory resources in line with agreed school policies. For example, children in early years engage in activities such as exploring different textures to develop their physical and sensory skills. They then respond enthusiastically when asked to reflect upon their achievements.
- The most able pupils further up the school engage in more formal work, such as formulating sums from number stories or learning how to read and record measurements. They begin to use and apply the letters of the alphabet to make sentences from their understanding of picture symbols. In a swimming lesson, most-able pupils were making outstanding progress in developing the confidence to float and use their arms for swimming unaided. Less-able pupils were able to be supported so they could relax their bodies in the water.
- Learners in the 16–19 department experience learning outside the classroom, for example when on work experience placements. Learners are involved fully in decision-making about their next steps after leaving the school. The most able demonstrate good social skills when engaging with visitors. They shake hands with a friendly, confident greeting. All learners take part in an ASDAN independent living course which leads to accreditation.
- The transition arrangements from class to class and post-19 are outstanding. There is always an emphasis on developing pupils' independence and resilience through an engaging and stimulating curriculum.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is monitored very well by senior leaders. Teachers and support staff respond well to feedback provided by

adapting and improving their work. Some subject leaders are developing smaller steps of learning for pupils in their planning to ensure that they are always engaged in learning and do not become passive or off-task.

- The great majority of pupils make good or better progress in their learning, behaviour, social, personal, speech, communication, physical and sensory development from very low starting points. Leaders ensure that there is always an emphasis on high expectations and challenge in the classroom. By the time they leave the school, all pupils move on successfully to the next stage, for example a college course or supported independent living placements. Small cohort numbers mean that it is not possible to compare pupils' outcomes with national figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is an even sharper focus on planning for individual pupils' learning needs in all subjects so that they achieve the best possible outcomes
- there is a continued focus on active partnership working with parents so that they feel fully confident in developing their children's resilience and independence.

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

Jon Ashley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team met with you and your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. A meeting was held with three governors. A meeting was also held with the local authority school improvement partner. Inspectors conducted joint visits to lessons with you and your deputy headteacher. They looked at pupils' learning journeys, workbooks, folders, individual education plans and classroom displays. Inspectors observed pupils around school and on arrival at the school. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's review of its strengths and areas to develop, the school development plan and information about pupils' ability levels and progress. Inspectors looked at documentation relating to safeguarding, including safe recruitment of staff and risk assessments. Inspectors considered staff and parent survey information from the online questionnaire site. Inspectors also considered the most recent school-based survey of parental views. There were no responses from pupils from the online questionnaire site.