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12 December 2017

Ms Kerry Sternstein
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Sternstein

Short inspection of Treehouse School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 2017 with Teresa Skeggs, 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 October 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 appointment as headteacher in September 2016 has been instrumental in this. Following a period of change in the senior team, your inspirational leadership has brought a renewed sense of purpose to the school's work. You are relentless in your drive for excellence, as your incisive evaluation of the school's effectiveness shows. Together with your skilled leadership team, you have wasted no time in setting a clear vision for the school's future direction and securing further improvements. Governors and trustees have complete confidence in your work, while providing you with the necessary challenge to ensure that the school goes from strength to strength.

The school's vision for 'making the ordinary possible' is palpable. Staff share an unwavering commitment to improving pupils' life chances and ensuring that they reach their potential, irrespective of their needs or starting points. All pupils have highly complex social, emotional and communication needs, typically linked to their diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. The vast majority join the school with a history of disrupted education and challenging behaviour. Exceptional levels of care and guidance facilitate significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and emotional well-being. Adults are highly attuned to pupils' needs, including signs that pupils may be feeling anxious or overwhelmed. They intervene calmly and consistently to manage incidents of challenging behaviour and help pupils feel secure. As a result, pupils re-engage in their learning and are increasingly ready to challenge

themselves. This, together with the school's outstanding curriculum, ensures that the majority of pupils make excellent progress over time. Parents are typically complimentary about the school's work, using words such as 'wonderful' and 'amazing' to describe their children's experiences at Treehouse.

Following your appointment, you quickly identified that difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably skilled staff had led to a temporary dip in the quality of teaching. You took swift action to tackle this. Staff development is a strength of the school and is complemented by a successful staff well-being programme. Both approaches have been key to the considerable reduction in staff turnover. The majority of staff feel well supported and are proud to work at the school. Equally, leaders manage staff performance rigorously and take decisive action to maintain high standards when necessary. Challenging targets aligned to the school's priorities for improvement mean that staff fully understand their roles in securing the best possible outcomes for pupils. Leaders are not complacent about the quality of education the school provides. For example, leaders are rightly focusing on refining school assessment systems to ensure an equal focus on pupils' personal development and academic outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Promoting pupils' emotional and physical well-being is at the heart of the school's work. Staff are highly aware of how pupils' complex needs may impact on their welfare and make them more vulnerable to harm. The school curriculum plays a key role in ensuring that pupils feel and are kept safe. Paramount importance is given to helping pupils know how to adapt their behaviour to different environments or social situations. For example, pupils learn how to identify and minimise risks to their welfare in the home and in the wider world, including when they go online.

The school's strong safeguarding culture ensures that staff are vigilant and take all the necessary steps to keep pupils safe. Comprehensive training keeps staff up to date with potential risks, such as those posed by radicalisation, female genital mutilation and unsafe use of the internet. Staff know how to report concerns and get assistance when they need it, including contacting the local authority. Leaders ensure that concerns are reported promptly, documented carefully and referred to external agencies where necessary. Staff work sensitively with pupils and their families, to take account of their wishes, respect their dignity and support them to become as independent as possible. As a result, pupils feel happy and enjoy their time at school. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are safe and well cared for.

Leaders' oversight of safeguarding arrangements is rigorous. They regularly review school systems, including careful analysis of behaviour incidents to ensure that pupils receive the right levels of care and protection. Checks on the suitability of adults to work in the school are thorough as are the checks on visitors.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry for this inspection focused on the quality of the curriculum. In particular, inspectors considered the impact of the curriculum on pupils' successful preparation for life beyond the school.
- The school's carefully designed curriculum is impressive. Leaders and staff are skilled in personalising the curriculum to inspire and challenge pupils in equal measure. Pupils access a rich range of sporting, artistic and enterprise-based activities, which promote substantial gains in their emotional well-being and their communication and social skills. Older pupils benefit considerably from well-planned opportunities to develop their independent living skills. For example, pupils grow their own vegetables and are taught how to prepare meals safely. Sixth-form students take part in a well-supervised employability programme, including work experience in the local community. This grows students' independence and strengthens their interpersonal skills.
- Staff use their considerable expertise to build pupils' ability to cope with new or different experiences. This means that pupils are able to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them and broaden their understanding of the world around them. For example, pupils go skiing, visit galleries and the theatre and participate in competitive sports events with other schools. Pupils from Years 7 to 14 take part in residential trips, which give them the confidence to apply their skills in an unfamiliar environment. In themselves, these trips represent a considerable achievement. For many pupils, it is the first time they have successfully managed extended time away from home.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum gives due attention to the development of pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics. Leaders and staff have high expectations. They plan well-targeted activities, which motivate pupils to apply their knowledge in relevant and practical contexts, such as designing activities for the Christmas fayre or selling items in the school shop. As a result, pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the challenges they may face beyond the school, including their move to further education, training or employment.
- You have made strengthening assessment systems a priority for improvement. Therefore, my second line of enquiry focused on the impact of this work. I considered how well leaders and staff use assessment information to plan activities that simultaneously nurture and challenge pupils in their learning.
- Leaders and staff carry out thorough checks on pupils' development. This enables staff to plan highly individualised programmes of learning that take account of pupils' starting points, as well as their complex needs. Leaders' and teachers' high aspirations are evident in the challenging goals they set pupils. The school's culture puts no ceiling on pupils' achievement. Additional adults make a strong contribution to pupils' learning because they focus on helping pupils achieve their goals rather than on what they cannot do.
- Leaders and teachers review pupils' progress towards their targets regularly. Pupils who struggle receive extra help promptly. Well-targeted interventions enable pupils to regulate their behaviour and emotions so they focus on their learning and are resilient when they find work hard. As a result, pupils typically

make substantial progress over time. This is exemplified in the very high rates of sixth-form students who move on to further education, employment or training when they leave the school. In 2017, all students secured suitable placements. Extremely effective partnerships with families and providers ensure that students progress to destinations that are well matched to their needs and interests.

- Wisely, you are working closely with other special schools to continually evaluate and strengthen school assessment systems. Your work in this area is proving to be innovative. For example, you have implemented a new approach to checking sixth-form students' readiness for their future education or employment. This means that leaders continually refine the curriculum to facilitate the best possible outcomes for students.
- Due to pupils' complex social and emotional needs, leaders have rightly ensured that the assessment tools capture small but significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and well-being. You have prioritised fine-tuning progress measures to ensure that teachers build an equally precise picture of pupils' academic achievement. Opportunities for teachers to benchmark pupils' work with other schools are increasing the reliability of their assessments. Nevertheless, on occasions, checks on pupils' outcomes overly focus on pupils' personal development. In part, this is because more work is needed to unify the different assessment measures into an integrated whole-school system. You are taking effective action to address this, but improvements are not fully embedded.
- My final line of enquiry focused on leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance, particularly those pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. In 2016, pupils' absences rates were higher than those of other schools nationally.
- Leaders take effective action to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by poor attendance. Staff follow up any absence rigorously, involving external agencies and families promptly when concerns are identified. Leaders' comprehensive knowledge of pupils' complex needs means that additional support is precisely targeted at removing their individual barriers to good attendance. As a result, pupils attend school regularly. Very few pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are persistently absent from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- information on pupils' outcomes is drawn together cohesively and leaders use this information fully to inform their strategic decision-making.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with senior leaders, inspectors visited classes across the school to observe pupils' learning. One inspector visited sixth-form students taking part in work experience in the community. Inspectors held several meetings with the leadership team to review the school's evaluation of its effectiveness, priorities for improvement and information on pupils' outcomes, including a review of their work. Meetings were held with members of the governing body and representatives from the trust, including the chief executive officer. An inspector held a telephone discussion with the school's improvement partner. Inspectors also considered documentation related to safeguarding and held a meeting with leaders with responsibility for this aspect of the school's work. Discussions took place with a group of staff to ascertain their views on the school. Inspectors also considered the 38 responses to Ofsted's staff survey as well as a letter from a staff member. The views of parents were gathered through the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, one letter from a parent and a meeting and telephone conversation with two parents. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experiences of the school. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.