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Ms Paula Wareing  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Wareing

### **Short inspection of Meadowside School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 2018 with Howard Bousfield, 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 October 2012.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The leadership team has maintained many of the strengths that were identified at the last inspection. For example, you have ensured that a relentless focus has been maintained on preparing pupils for life after Meadowside. In particular, they have continued to benefit from an extensive range of opportunities for work-related learning. Furthermore, pupils continue to make excellent progress in their personal and social development while at the school. As a result, they are exceptionally friendly, polite and well mannered. The school's positive work to promote British values and develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding has further enhanced their preparedness for life in modern Britain.

You have ensured that the school's caring and inclusive ethos continues to foster excellent relationships among pupils and between pupils and staff. Pupils enjoy being part of the school community and speak very fondly of staff. Typical comments from pupils included: 'We're a perfect team and we all get along' and 'We care about each other and help someone if they are upset.' Parents and carers typically say that their children are happy at the school and that the school has played a key role in increasing their child's confidence and self-esteem. Members of staff enjoy working at the school. They feel proud to be a member of the Meadowside community and feel well supported by leaders who, they feel, are considerate of their well-being.

You have effectively addressed the area for improvement that inspectors identified during the previous inspection in relation to communication with parents. You have greatly increased the range and effectiveness of strategies in this area. For example, you have made good use of electronic systems to improve the efficacy and frequency of contact with parents. You have also ensured that the termly 'Meadowside Magazine' provides an impressive focal point for celebrating pupils' achievements and informing parents about the curriculum. As a result, parents feel well informed about their child's learning.

In contrast, leaders have not effectively addressed the areas for improvement that were identified in relation to improving teaching. Inspectors gathered evidence to indicate that the effectiveness with which teachers use ongoing assessment remains inconsistent. As a result, some teachers do not routinely plan learning that builds on what pupils have learned in the past. Furthermore, they do not consistently provide work that challenges pupils of different abilities, including the most able, to make rapid progress. In some lessons, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently. In others, low-ability pupils struggle to complete work because it is too demanding or has been explained poorly by the teacher.

Inspectors also identified that there are weaknesses in the strategic leadership of the school. The school's self-evaluation is overly generalised and overgenerous. Leaders' assertions are not based upon secure evidence because their systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are not systematic. Furthermore, leaders' plans to improve the school do not contain specific and measurable targets by which to measure the success of their actions. As a result, it is very difficult for governors and leaders to evaluate progress towards the achievement of different objectives. In addition, leaders' response to the marked increase in pupils' absence over the last three years has not been strong.

The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is the weakest aspect of the school's work. Governors have not effectively held you to account for the school's work in this area. This is in contrast to the thorough way in which they have overseen your use of resources. Senior leaders have not held middle leaders stringently to account for the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment in their areas of responsibility. Furthermore, the quality of curriculum plans varies significantly between subjects. There are pronounced variations in the quality of teaching. This is because training for teachers has not ensured that they are able to plan appropriate learning for pupils of differing abilities. Leaders' weak systems for monitoring the quality of teaching have also contributed to the inconsistencies that remain. Despite these inconsistencies in teaching, your information about pupils' progress indicates that the majority of pupils are exceeding your expectations. This indicates that teachers' assessments of what pupils can achieve are too generous, or that the school's expectations of what they can achieve are too low.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have created a strong safeguarding culture within the school. Leaders and staff share a clear understanding of the ways in which pupils are potentially more vulnerable as a result of their special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Leaders have ensured that there are effective systems in place for pupils to disclose information to staff. They ensure that all pupils have a voice and are listened to carefully, even when pupils find it challenging to communicate via conventional methods. For example, staff are adept at using visual communication systems to ensure that pupils with little or no speech can explain how they feel and can communicate concerns. Pupils speak fondly of their relationships with members of staff. All pupils we spoke to made it clear that they would feel comfortable and confident talking to any member of staff if they had worries or concerns.

Leaders have also ensured that the curriculum helps pupils to develop a clear understanding of safety. For example, pupils learn about e-safety, drugs and alcohol, and what constitutes healthy relationships. Pupils are also supported in developing a clear understanding of what bullying is. They explained to inspectors that they use the acronym 'STOP' to help them understand how bullying involves acts of cruelty 'several times on purpose'. Pupils explained how bullying is exceptionally rare at the school. They also expressed their confidence in the ability of staff to resolve such issues should they occur.

Pupils explained that they feel very safe at school. They value the systems that have recently been put in place to increase security in the school building. There are clear systems in place for ensuring that pupils are safe when they are travelling to and from school using transport provided by the local authority. Leaders have ensured that pupils are closely supervised at all times during the school day. The school works effectively with a range of agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Leaders have also established a culture in which pupils are keen to support each other.

You work closely with parents to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. Staff and governors receive regular training on matters relating to safety. Staff refer concerns, as appropriate, to leaders. You have ensured that all safeguarding records are precise and fit for purpose.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to look at how effectively the increase in absence over the last two years has been addressed. You presented evidence that indicates that rates of absence have remained well above historical national averages for special schools during the current academic year. Furthermore, the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent remains very high. Despite this, you have not made the need to improve systems for supporting pupils' regular attendance a key focus of the school's work. In particular, leaders' systems for tracking pupils' attendance are weak.
- Those staff responsible for attendance know pupils well. They can explain the reasons for pupils' frequent absence and what has been done to support them. Many pupils who are frequently absent have acute medical conditions that require frequent time off school.
- A second line of enquiry focused on how effectively the curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to lead happy and successful lives after Meadowside.

You have established a clear rationale for the overall design of the curriculum. This framework underpins the development of the curriculum for groups of pupils on differing pathways. The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils' personal development. It also teaches them how to keep themselves safe.

- Middle leaders have not ensured that the quality of curriculum plans in different subjects is of a consistently high standard. In particular, the quality of long-term curriculum planning is weak. As a result, leaders have not effectively mapped how pupils will make good progress in the development of their knowledge and skills across the curriculum.
- Finally, we looked at whether all groups of pupils continue to make good or better progress throughout the school. You presented assessment information that indicates that the large majority of pupils are making progress across the curriculum that exceeds the school's expectations. Your tracking information is very detailed. It looks closely at the amount of progress made by different groups of pupils, such as those who are eligible for free school meals and those on different curriculum pathways. According to the school's information, all groups of pupils are making impressive progress.
- Despite the school's information, inspectors did not find evidence to confirm that pupils are making rapid progress throughout the school. Inspectors scrutinised a broad sample of pupils' work, but this did not indicate consistently good progress over time. Moreover, observations of teaching and learning created a very mixed picture of the amount of progress being made by pupils. As a result, either leaders' information about the amount of progress pupils are making is inaccurate or leaders' expectations of the amount of progress pupils can make are too low.
- You have developed effective systems for tracking pupils' social and personal development. Inspection evidence confirmed that pupils are making good progress in these areas.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the leadership and management of teaching, learning and assessment are improved to reduce variabilities in the quality of teaching by:
  - strengthening systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching so that a clearer and more accurate view is gained of its effectiveness
  - developing training for teachers so that they are able to provide pupils of all abilities, including the most able, with work that is well matched to their starting points
  - holding middle leaders to account for the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment in their areas
  - developing curriculum plans for each subject to support pupils in making good progress in the development of their knowledge and skills across the curriculum

- reviewing the school's use of information about pupils' progress to ensure that data is reliable and leaders' expectations of what pupils can achieve are sufficiently high
- strengthening the way in which governors oversee this aspect of the school's work
- plans to improve the school containing specific and measurable targets that will enable leaders and governors to monitor and measure progress
- a more strategic approach being adopted to the tracking of pupils' attendance to enable the school to help pupils attend more frequently.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding. We also met with members of the governing body. We spoke with the school's improvement partner and a representative of the local authority. We met formally with groups of pupils and talked informally with others around the school and during lessons. We met formally with a group of staff, which included teachers and teaching assistants.

Leaders accompanied us on visits to classes, where we observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects. We also looked at work produced by pupils throughout the school in English and mathematics. We looked at a selection of pupils' learning journals, which document the progress they have made during their time at the school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at breaktimes.

We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. We also scrutinised a range of policies, the school improvement plan and self-evaluation report. Inspectors looked at the school's website.

As part of the inspection, we considered 29 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. We also looked at nine responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and seven comments from parents that were received through Ofsted's free-text facility. There were not enough responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, to be significant. An inspector spoke to parents at the start of the day.