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Mrs Janet Allan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Allan

Short inspection of Peterhouse School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 2018 with Elizabeth Clarke, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Peterhouse is a warm, welcoming and happy school. From their very first day, pupils and their families are made to feel part of the Peterhouse family. Staff go the extra mile every lesson, every day to make sure pupils achieve their potential. Parents are unanimous in their support for your 'amazing school'.

You and your staff put pupils' best interests at the heart of every decision. Leaders and staff are refreshingly honest about the school's performance. On the rare occasion when your ambitious plans do not work out quite as you hoped, you make sure you reflect on what did not go so well and why. Then you adapt your future plans, taking into account those lessons learned. This reflective approach has helped you take the school from strength to strength since the previous inspection.

The school is calm and orderly. You set high expectations for pupils' behaviour both in lessons and around school. You make sure that pupils understand the school rules. Pupils are exceptionally keen to please their teachers as well as to earn Peterhouse points for their behaviour. Teaching staff make sure that strategies are in place to help pupils cope remarkably well with the demands of the school day, whatever their individual needs.

You recognise the school's greatest asset is its staff. You make sure that you provide on-going training so that staff have the skills and expertise to meet the increasingly diverse needs of your pupils. You encourage staff to develop their careers. Many of your staff have studied for recognised professional qualifications while working at the school. Staff are proud to work at Peterhouse. They trust and respect senior leaders and appreciate the valuable support you all give them. As a result, you have a stable staff team that has the wealth of experience and expertise which accounts for the high-quality teaching and learning across the school.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop interests and enthusiasms. During our visit, pupils' high-quality art work was on display to the public in the local shopping arcade. At lunchtime, pupils enjoyed playing in the snow, listening to music and taking part in a game of badminton. Staff encourage pupils to find hobbies which they can pursue into adult life. Staff make sure pupils take part in a wide range of activities to find the ones they enjoy, including mountain biking, painting and gardening. Pupils become adept at self-occupying as they move through the school.

Your new chair of governors is a 'breath of fresh air'. You value the challenge as well as the support he provides. The chair is taking the opportunity to review the experience and expertise of the governing body as you plan the long-term vision for the school. Leaders, governors and trustees do not step on each other's toes. You understand and respect each other's roles and responsibilities. You work well together in the best interests of the school. You do not shy away from difficult conversations. You value each other's opinions. Together with the trustees, governors keep a close eye on the school's performance. Consequently, governors and trustees have a deep understanding of the school, which helps them contribute to its continued improvement.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked the school to maximise learning time to make sure lessons keep to expected times. Following the inspection, senior leaders spent time in lessons to find out more about how learning time was being used. You shared your findings with teaching staff. Each class team tailored their response to your findings and to the needs of their pupils. As a result of the changes class teams made, pupils have high levels of engagement in learning across the school. Moreover, teachers plan and deliver lessons which take account of pupils' preferred learning styles, get off to a prompt start and proceed without interruption. Class teams make sure that the length of lessons is appropriate for pupils and pupils are clear what is expected of them.

You and your leadership team make sure that you seek external validation to reassure yourselves that the quality of education at Peterhouse continues to be outstanding. You have earned several awards, including for arts and quality in careers standards as well as autism accreditation. You have informal links to a number of similar schools and invite an external consultant to review the work of the school. You are keen to embrace the wealth of school-to-school support opportunities locally, regionally and nationally available now. This will help develop the school further as well as enable you to share your best practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that pre-employment checks are thorough to reassure themselves that staff are suitable to work with children. All staff are up to date in their training and carry out their roles and responsibilities assiduously. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding training and procedures take into account the additional vulnerabilities and needs of Peterhouse pupils. Record keeping is meticulous. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. You make sure that all pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe both in the community and online. Pupils are adamant that any rare incidents of bullying would be dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Parents and pupils agree pupils are 'safe, well-cared for and thought about, all day, every day'.

Inspection findings

- Pupils enjoy school and are reluctant to miss a moment. The overwhelming majority of pupils attend school on time, every day. A very small number of pupils miss out on some learning due to term-time holidays and illness. You make sure that you keep a close eye on pupils' attendance rates. Staff follow up on any decline in pupils' attendance. You help families access the help and support they need if they are struggling to get their children to school. Recently, you have taken on a number of pupils who have not attended their previous school for very long periods of time. Your outreach workers have succeeded in re-engaging these pupils when every other approach had failed. Parents, who had believed their children would never return to school, are delighted.
- Pupils make strong progress at Peterhouse. Your new curriculum makes sure that your pupils are acquiring the knowledge and skills they need when they leave school, right from the start. Quite rightly, you recognise the importance of making sure your pupils can apply their learning over time, in different places, with different people. You have sharpened the targets in pupils' education, health and care plans. This helps you to report pupils' progress towards these goals clearly and accurately to parents and other professionals. You keep a close eye on pupils' academic as well as personal and social development through your half-termly pupil progress meetings. You take urgent and decisive action if any pupil starts to fall behind.
- You make sure that pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps. You tailor the curriculum to meet the interests and aptitudes of your older pupils so that they make well-considered choices at the end of key stages 4 and 5. You help pupils make informed choices about study, work and living. Moreover, you raise aspirations and expectations for pupils and their families. Taster days at local colleges help pupils to realise what they can achieve. Comprehensive transition arrangements make sure that pupils make a success of their next steps after Peterhouse.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they further develop links with other schools to learn from best practice locally, regionally and nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- The inspectors met with senior leaders, teaching and support staff and the chair of the governing body. An inspector also spoke to a representative of Autism Initiatives, the charity responsible for the school.
- Inspectors contacted representatives of local authorities who have pupils placed at the school.
- Inspectors spoke to a representative of a local college which a number of former pupils attend.
- The inspectors considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as talking to a number of parents during the inspection.
- An inspector met formally with a group of staff and considered the 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff.
- An inspector considered the three responses to Ofsted's online survey of pupils as well as meeting formally with a group of pupils.
- The inspectors visited classrooms and checked on pupils' learning.
- The inspectors looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation and action plan as well as a range of other documentation.
- The inspectors conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training, recruitment checks and record keeping.