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Mrs Diane Atkinson
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Dear Mrs Atkinson

Short inspection of Crosshill Special School

Following my visit to the school on 11 April 2018 with Ann Gill, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have introduced many radical changes to the organisation of your school since your arrival as executive headteacher in April 2015. In September 2016, you commissioned a consultant to support you in this work, whom you subsequently appointed as head of provision. You are both highly effective in securing improvement and clearly have the benefit of pupils at the heart of everything you do. There are now many new structures in place and much higher expectations of staff and pupils than previously, which contribute to the greatly improved standard of education you provide. I shall elaborate on these later in this letter.

You and your head of provision are highly effective leaders who are ambitious for your pupils. You accurately identify the school's strengths and focus on ways of making the quality of education the best it can be. You have, for example, introduced a new curriculum that meets the needs of your pupils very effectively and ensures that they make rapid progress. There is a high degree of breadth in its content, allied with three pathways of learning that are closely matched to pupils' needs. Depending on their abilities, pupils follow an 'informal', a 'semi-formal' or a 'formal' curriculum. This enables them to learn a mixture of subjects that range

from practical life skills to more academic pursuits, such as English and mathematics, with a degree of challenge that closely matches individual needs.

You have addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection with considerable success. Teaching is highly effective, and you constantly consider its impact on pupils' learning. You have developed what you refer to as a 'key ingredients' document. This forms the basis of your evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. You ensure that teachers take the lead in planning activities led by teaching assistants and share practice judged to be 'exemplary' to help improve teaching. They do this both with colleagues and with staff in other schools in the local authority, including mainstream schools. In discussion with me, teachers demonstrated that they are as ambitious as you and your leadership team to give pupils the highest possible quality of education. Evidence from books and the school's own assessment information revealed that pupils make very strong progress and complete work that is appropriately challenging. You recognise that continuing to share effective practice in this way will not only benefit other schools but also help to maintain the high quality of teaching at Crosshill Special School.

Since the last inspection, you have established a new and robust system to check the performance of teachers. There are now high expectations of staff, and you set targets based on pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and learning and the school's improvement priorities. You appraise the work of all staff, including teaching assistants, with the same process. You and your head of provision carry out a wide variety of frequent checks, both formal and informal, on the progress of staff towards meeting their targets. These include formal lesson observations and analysis of pupils' work. You now hold meetings to evaluate the progress of pupils every half term, rigorously holding teachers to account for their leadership of teaching and learning in their classes. You also use these meetings as opportunities to review pupils' education, health and care plans, so that pupils' targets remain relevant throughout the year. The local authority has recognised this as strong practice and has begun to share it with other schools.

You ensure that pupils arrive at school in the right frame of mind to learn. You have excellent systems in place so that they enter school in the morning and lose no learning time. Staff supervise their entry very efficiently, and they begin their work without delay, showing, through their behaviour and positive attitudes, that they are happy to be at school.

Parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, or who spoke with inspectors, expressed great satisfaction with the education and care the school provides. Typically, they said that their children receive excellent support for their needs and used phrases such as 'blossoming in confidence' to describe the progress children make.

Governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. They provide rigorous challenge and hold leaders to account highly effectively. For instance, they ask searching questions about the steps leaders take to improve

attendance and about matters connected with finance. Leaders recognise that they must now continue with their strategies to reduce pupils' rates of absence, a point I shall expand on below.

Staff are very positive about the work of the school. They appreciate the training you provide and find it beneficial. This includes the activities you organise to support their well-being, such as pottery sessions. In conversation with me, they spoke knowledgeably about the ways in which the school has a planned approach to developing pupils' independence. This involves a range of activities, including ensuring that pupils organise their own equipment and resources in class, or providing opportunities to develop their understanding of how to go shopping. Staff have a firm understanding of the range of pupils' needs and how to meet them.

The local authority has justifiable confidence in the school's leadership and provides a level of support that appropriately reflects this. There is also a highly positive working relationship between the school and those at the local authority who are responsible for overseeing the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Managers frequently invite you and your leaders to share your expertise with other schools, including mainstream schools, by, for example, providing training for staff.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have a secure system for entering the school building, and office staff carry out appropriate identity checks on visitors. The school's record of the necessary checks on members of staff is comprehensive and meets requirements.

There is a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures and have a deep knowledge of their pupils. They know the signs of different types of abuse and are constantly alert to changes in pupils' behaviours that could indicate a concern. Leaders have put in place a range of alternative means of communication, so that pupils can share worries with adults if they need to do so. These include the use of various forms of signing and pictorial messages. Pupils show from their excellent behaviour and their warm relationships with adults that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed certain key lines of enquiry. I have already written about the success with which you have addressed the areas for improvement included in the previous inspection report. I have also written about the effectiveness of safeguarding in the school.
- Another focus concerned the strength of progress in English and in mathematics of pupils in key stage 4. Leaders have secured greatly improved teaching and have set high expectations of teachers, as summarised in their 'key ingredients' document. A broad and rich curriculum enables teachers to plan activities in

detail that match individual needs exceptionally well and provide suitably challenging work. Evidence from the school's own assessment information and from other sources clearly shows that pupils make rapid progress from their various starting points. Typically, all pupils in Year 11 leave school with a qualification in both English and mathematics, in addition to other qualifications.

- I also explored how leaders ensure that high proportions of pupils go on to sustained education, employment or training after key stage 4. Assessment information over the last three years shows that all pupils who left the school were successful in entering education, employment or training. Evidence from pupils' work and the school's assessment information show that almost all current pupils make strong progress. Highly effective teaching, ambitious expectations and bespoke planning are, again, at the core of this success. For example, in English, pupils in the 'formal' learning group in key stage 3 progress rapidly from writing short sentences with support to writing a simple, extended recount of a trip to Blackpool, using a word processing program on the computer. Leaders recognise that they should continue with their teaching and learning strategies to maintain this strong progress.
- Another focus for the inspection concerned pupils' attendance and the management of exclusions. Rates of absence and persistent absence are reducing over time, but you recognise that they are still above the national average. You now have a range of increasingly effective strategies in place. These include regularly providing parents with information about the importance of good attendance and working with the local authority's attendance officer to visit parents of more frequent absentees. You accept that you need to continue with your strategies to reduce rates of absence even further.
- There have been no permanent exclusions since the last inspection. There have been very few fixed-term exclusions, and you have managed these well. Records and reporting are thorough and you follow the correct procedures. There have always been valid reasons for these exclusions and you systematically record the actions you have taken to support pupils on their return to school.
- Finally, leaders thoroughly understand their statutory responsibilities. The school's website is now compliant. Governors are fully aware of their duties regarding such matters as safeguarding and make regular checks on leaders' management of it.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with their very effective teaching and learning strategies to sustain the strong progress that pupils make
- they continue to share their best practice, enabling them to support other schools and to maintain their focus on providing a high quality of education at Crosshill Special School
- they further reduce rates of absence by persisting with their current strategies.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The team inspector and I carried out short visits to key stage 3 and key stage 4, which were joint activities with you and the head of provision. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, records of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of pupils. We held discussions with senior leaders, other members of staff, governors, pupils and a representative of the mainstream high school, with which Crosshill Special School is co-located. We held discussions on the telephone with parents and with headteachers of local schools and colleges, including those pupils attend when they finish Year 11. We also spoke with representatives of the local authority. We analysed the school's own assessment information. We evaluated 18 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. We also analysed 27 responses to the staff survey and 10 responses to the pupil survey.