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Mr Philip Hoyland
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Dear Mr Hoyland

Short inspection of Bridgelea Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to the school on 18 April 2018 with Cole Andrew, 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.

You, your senior leaders and governors know your school extremely well. You have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. You share an ambitious vision for the school. Your school development plan sets out clearly the steps you plan to take to achieve your goals.

You make sure that the best interests of pupils are at the heart of your work. You and your colleagues continually look for ways in which you can refine and improve what you offer your pupils, local schools and families. This focused approach has helped you resolve the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, as well as respond successfully to the changing profile of pupils who attend your school. You and your team go above and beyond your responsibilities, particularly for your most vulnerable pupils, including those who are looked after and have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Consequently, the vast majority of your pupils settle in quickly, re-engage with learning and start to catch up with their peers.

Bridgelea is held in high regard by colleagues in schools across Manchester, the local authority and other professionals. They trust your assessments of pupils' needs and value your advice. As a result, places at Bridgelea are in high demand.

Despite many pupils having experienced failure in their previous schools, pupils enjoy coming to this school. They get on well with adults as well as with each other. Your

pupils appreciate the positive difference the school has made to them, both socially and academically. Pupils talked to inspectors about their increased levels of confidence and growing self-esteem.

Senior leaders recognise and appreciate the challenges faced by staff, working with pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. You appreciate the hard work and commitment of your team. Staff applaud the wealth of training and support you provide to help them to do their jobs well. Moreover, they are delighted with the range of support you have put in place recently to promote their health and well-being. New staff and staff at the beginning of their careers feel well supported, both formally and informally. You encourage staff to gain qualifications and experience which will stand them in good stead for the next step in their careers. As a consequence, staff morale is good.

Governors have also made improvements since the previous inspection. They are proud to describe themselves as a 'much more professional governing body' now. Governors have the skills, expertise and experience needed to provide effective challenge and support to school leaders. They have made sure that they have a deep understanding of the school. Governors seek reassurance that the wealth of information given to them about the school's performance is reliable. This helps them to provide the effective strategic leadership to take the school from strength to strength.

Since the previous inspection, the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan which names Bridgelea has increased considerably. The number of pupils who attend the school for a short period of time to prevent exclusion has reduced. Consequently, you have reorganised your three school sites to start to better meet the varying needs of your three different pupil groups. Your youngest pupils attend Bridgelea Central. Your older pupils who have an EHC plan attend Bridgelea East. Pupils who are at risk of exclusion and remain dual-registered with their mainstream school attend Bridgelea South. Since the previous inspection, you have worked hard to ensure consistency across all aspects of the school's provision and across the three sites. This has had a positive impact on pupils' learning and behaviour.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to effect improvements to pupils' achievements in reading, as well as to increase the impact of middle leaders on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising pupils' achievement across the curriculum. We gathered a wealth of evidence to help us to evaluate how successful you have been in resolving these weaknesses. We were impressed by leaders' effectiveness in making the required improvements. The hard work you and your colleagues have put into improving the school's provision for reading has paid dividends. The vast majority of pupils are making at least expected progress in reading and many are making accelerated progress across the school. Your middle leaders have stepped up to the mark. Your English and mathematics subject leaders, together with the SEN coordinator and pastoral lead, are making a significant contribution to improving outcomes for your pupils. I have reported on these lines of enquiry in more detail below.

As a school, you have different goals for each group of pupils. The needs of your pupils are very different depending on the reason they have come to Bridgelea and the length of their stay. You recognise now that you need to tailor your curriculum for each group of pupils to ensure that they are able to achieve those goals, including extra-curricular and enrichment activities. You have already taken some steps to address this challenge with the different timetables for each site.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's safeguarding culture is strong. Leaders carry out thorough pre-employment checks to reassure themselves that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff undertake frequent, high-quality training to make sure that they understand and carry out their roles and responsibilities diligently. Record-keeping is meticulous and any concerns are followed up assiduously. The school works well with external partners to signpost pupils and their families to the help and support they need.

The school uses information well to identify pupils' needs. The safeguarding lead liaises closely with the personal, social and health education lead teacher. They work well together to plan activities to address any emerging issues, for example road safety or anti-bullying.

Staff vigilance makes sure that pupils are kept safe. Moreover, staff ensure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and online.

Inspection findings

- Our first line of enquiry was to follow up an area for improvement from the previous inspection. We gathered evidence to find out whether you and your leaders had effected the required improvements to pupils' achievements in reading. Leaders have taken decisive and effective actions to address this area of weakness. Daily phonics teaching helps the youngest pupils to get off to a good start in building their early reading skills and their confidence. Focused one-to-one reading sessions make sure that pupils are reading to, and also with, an adult frequently. Whole-class reading sessions help pupils to develop greater fluency, improve comprehension and tackle more challenging texts. The English subject lead has a good grasp of the quality of provision across the school. The school's more structured approach to assessment means that teachers are matching work more closely to pupils' needs. Leaders' investment in high-quality fiction and non-fiction is paying dividends. There are bright, attractive class reading areas which entice pupils to pick up a book. Pupils look forward to listening to their teachers read the class book each day. Leaders have made sure that both teachers and teaching assistants have had comprehensive training to make sure they have the skills and knowledge to teach reading well. As a result, pupils are overcoming their barriers to being successful readers; they are now making more rapid progress

from their starting points and are keen to read.

- Our second line of enquiry focused on the school's actions to improve the effectiveness of middle leaders, so that this group support leaders' drive to raise achievement. You and senior leaders have made sure that the middle leaders responsible for English and mathematics have had the time, resources and support to make a considerable impact on their subjects. The English lead has helped to accelerate pupils' progress in reading. She has now turned her attentions to raising standards in writing. The work of the mathematics lead has transformed pupils' rates of progress. Comprehensive training and support have helped teachers and teaching assistants to introduce a new approach to teaching mathematics. This approach better meets the needs of pupils and is helping them to secure their understanding of number. Senior leaders have provided hands-on support to middle leaders, including the SEN coordinator. This has helped middle leaders to develop a wide range of skills. Middle leaders are now more confident to check on pupils' work in books, analyse performance data, deliver training and support their colleagues. Both governors and senior leaders hold middle leaders to account for their impact on pupils' achievement. Consequently, the school's capacity for improvement has increased.
- During the inspection, we sought reassurance that you and senior leaders make sure that standards of behaviour are high and any incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with. Senior leaders keep a close eye on patterns and trends of behaviour across the three sites. They take swift and decisive action when issues arise. Frequent training ensures that staff are skilled in de-escalating incidents. Any disruptions to learning are dealt with swiftly, calmly and proportionately by staff, so that lessons proceed with minimal disruption. As a result, classrooms are generally calm and orderly. Staff set clear and consistent expectations for pupils' behaviour. However, staff use their expertise and experience to identify any underlying causes for pupils' behaviour when they join the school. Staff make sure that pupils have the support and help they need to regulate their behaviour, as well as helping with any additional learning needs such as dyslexia. Despite almost all pupils having a history of challenging behaviour, they generally follow instructions, try hard with their work and are keen to please teaching staff. Moreover, the frequency and severity of incidents have reduced.
- Finally, we considered the effectiveness of the school's strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. The pastoral lead makes sure that all pupil absence is followed up meticulously. The pastoral lead gets to know families well. She makes sure that those families who struggle to get their child to school have the support and help they need. However, the school makes sure that families are in no doubt of the importance of good school attendance. Leaders do not shy away from taking legal action when required. As a result, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is lower now than in previous years and is below the national average. Moreover, rates of absence are reducing and are closer to the national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further develop the school's curriculum so that it meets the needs of different pupil groups in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson-Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you and senior leaders, and teaching and support staff. One of us met with the chair and two members of the governing body. We also spoke to representatives of the local authority, an independent consultant who works with the school and headteachers from local schools. We considered the one response to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. One of us spoke to parents by phone. One of us met formally with a group of staff and considered the 40 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. We talked formally and informally to pupils throughout the school day. We visited the school's three sites. We spent time in classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at pupils' work in books and on walls. We looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and action plan, as well as a range of other documentation. We conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.