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Mr Ian Irwin
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Dear Mr Irwin

Short inspection of Stockport School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Ofsted Inspectors Steven Caldecott and Timothy Gartside, 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 November 2013.

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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a full section 5 inspection.

You have been pivotal in the school's success since the last inspection. You enjoy a great deal of support from staff, governors, parents and carers, and pupils. This has been achieved because of your strong and unequivocal leadership style, which is collegiate yet determined. The senior leadership team is strong and effective. The team, ably supported by middle leaders, has enabled pupils to make exceptional progress year on year by the end of Year 11. Pupils' life chances have been significantly improved, especially those of disadvantaged pupils, as a result of the school's relentless focus on high standards and its dedicated moral purpose. The school's motto 'Vellis et Remis' – meaning 'with sails and oars' – aptly characterises the school's collective passion and determination to achieve its goals.

Pupils have not only achieved very well academically across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, year on year, but they are supported well by staff, especially by the pastoral team. One parent said of the school in the Ofsted survey, 'Their pastoral care is also second to none.' This sentiment is echoed by

many other parents, staff and pupils in surveys and interviews. Pupils are very loyal, confident and articulate. They praise teachers for the support they provide and the unrelenting confidence they have in every pupil's potential.

You have devised simple but effective plans to drive improvements across the school. This has kept leaders focused. You have ensured that continuously improving the quality of teaching remains a permanent feature of development planning. All teachers invest in their own professional development and take regular opportunities to share good practice. As a result, teaching is effective in the vast majority of departments and pupils make considerable progress.

Subject leaders, especially of English and mathematics, take their responsibilities to develop their team and to be curriculum experts very seriously. This has meant that pupils are provided with high-quality learning opportunities, which they enjoy and relish. Pupils appreciate teachers' knowledge, skills and passion for their subject. Teachers have high expectations of every pupil. Pupils rise to this challenge as a result. The most able, in particular, are on track to make even better progress than in previous years across many subjects because teachers aim high.

At the last inspection, teachers were asked to challenge all pupils more and provide more opportunities for them to take responsibility for their learning. Teachers were also asked to check pupils' understanding more often. As a result of focused training and development since then, teachers consistently challenge pupils much more in lessons. Teachers regularly check pupils' work in class and address misunderstandings and reframe questions. As a consequence, pupils rise to these high expectations and make considerable progress from their different starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Teachers are vigilant regarding safeguarding matters and they know the routes to take if they have concerns about pupils' welfare. This is because they have received effective training on a regular basis. Leaders keep accurate and meticulous records which document any concerns raised by staff, whether they reach the local authority threshold for action or not. Leaders have excellent relationships with professional agencies and have demonstrated a tenacious attitude when they believe that specialist support is required for individual pupils.

You and the designated safeguarding leaders are dedicated to ensuring the safety of the whole school community. You are clear about the local risks to pupils' safety and have strengthened the personal, social and health curriculum to ensure that preventative measures are in place to keep pupils safe. Pupils know how to keep safe online and incidents of misuse of mobile telephones have been reduced significantly because the school has banned their use for some time.

Governors and the local authority safeguarding leader agree with the view that the school is doing everything it can to keep pupils safe. Pupils say they feel safe and

they praise the pastoral team, including their form tutors, for the support they receive. They also confirm the school's tracking information showing that bullying incidents, including prejudiced-based behaviour, are rare. A culture of inclusion permeates the school and being different is not a barrier to being accepted.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, published information suggested that pupils' absence rates and exclusions from school had been higher than the national averages. Inspectors noted that the proportion of pupils excluded from school has now decreased to below the national average. The previous spike in exclusions was a result of a small minority of pupils who had not adjusted well to the school's higher expectations for standards of behaviour. The behaviour of these pupils has markedly improved since they received their exclusion. The school's work to improve the attendance of some pupils who do not attend school regularly has been relentless. As a result, there have been significant improvements for a number of pupils. This success is due to the school's effective work with parents and external agencies. You and your leaders recognise that there is still more work to be done to improve the attendance of some pupils even more, especially the attendance of those who are persistently absent.
- Pupils' progress in modern foreign languages, specifically German and French, has recently been weaker than that in other key subjects. Fewer pupils make good or outstanding progress in French and German than in other areas. This is true especially for the most able. The school enters a much higher proportion of pupils for a foreign-language examination than the national average. This has been a deliberate decision by leaders to enhance pupils' skills, knowledge and international outlook further.
- Currently, the modern foreign languages faculty has much more stable staffing than previously. The subject leader, supported by the senior line manager, has devised a coherent plan to address the weaknesses identified in the analysis of pupils' performance in the examinations last year. For example, pupils are now undertaking more regular speaking tests and the department has enlisted the support of external moderators to check teachers' assessments of pupils' work. The school's information suggests that the current level of pupils' knowledge and skills is much higher than in previous years. The quality of teaching is now mostly strong, although you recognise that this department faces the challenge of a more demanding set of examinations this year. Improving and sustaining good and outstanding outcomes for pupils in this department remain a key focus for leaders.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attain very well compared to their peers nationally from the same starting points, year on year. However, you, senior leaders and governors never lose focus on the ambitious target of eradicating the attainment difference between these groups and others. The differences are diminishing year on year. Leaders know and understand each pupil's possible barriers to learning and work hard to address them. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the pupil-premium champion review the provision for eligible pupils and ensure that funds are spent wisely and effectively.

- Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary. In lessons, they work extremely well with one another. They strive to do their best and listen intently to the teacher. They are enthusiastic. For example, in a drama lesson, they demonstrated remarkable creativity and confidence, despite other adults watching them. Inspectors did not witness any disruption to learning. There was no discernible difference between the work produced by different groups of pupils, including boys and girls.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress and attainment in languages continue to improve
- the small proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school improve their attendance even more.

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

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and subject leaders for English and mathematics. One of us also met with the leader of modern foreign languages. I met the person responsible for maintaining the single central register and the designated safeguarding leaders. We met with pastoral leaders and the SENCo. I met with the local authority's senior school improvement adviser and spoke on the telephone with the local authority safeguarding leader. I met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body. We observed teaching and tutorial sessions and one of us visited the breakfast club. We observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtime. I took account of 143 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 120 free-text responses and one letter received from a parent. I took account of the 75 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 24 responses to the pupils' survey. We also met with various groups of pupils from both key stages. I looked at school documents, including information about pupils' achievements, the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, information related to the monitoring of teaching and documents relating to safeguarding.