

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Paul Adair  
Headteacher  
Castlebar School  
Hathaway Gardens  
Ealing  
London  
W13 0DH

Dear Mr Adair

### **Short inspection of Castlebar School**

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2018 with Samuel Nowak, 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 June 2014.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and governors have sustained a culture of high aspirations and excellent outcomes. You are determined to keep improving the school by refining structures, using the latest research and evaluating the school's performance against the highest standards.

Your exceptional leadership has secured the total commitment of all staff, resulting in a motivated workforce. You have strengthened leadership at all levels by remodelling the leadership and management structure. Middle leaders have increasing responsibility for developing excellent teaching and raising pupils' achievements. A particular strength of the school is that staff are highly expert in supporting pupils' needs because they know the pupils very well.

You place pupils' needs, high-quality teaching and successful learning at the heart of everything you do. Strong partnerships exist with parents and carers, who are full of praise for this outstanding school. Typical comments from parents include, 'Everybody goes beyond the call of duty', 'The school is like my child's second home' and, 'We were unsure about sending our child to a special school but now our opinion has changed. Such an amazing school'.

Governors are highly effective while being very supportive, and hold leaders to account for all aspects of the school's work. Governors are frequent visitors to the school and monitor with rigour areas such as safeguarding, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Governors regularly review their work and make strong

contributions to the strategic development of the school.

Castlebar School is a model of specialist educational excellence that serves the local community and beyond extremely well. The school's outstanding practice is highly valued by the local authority. As a teaching school, you have successfully formed an alliance with a group of mainstream primary and special schools, offering high-quality training to help other schools to improve.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, your leadership team and governors have established a strong culture to keep pupils safe. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. A safe environment exists where pupils can learn and develop. Pupils say that they feel safe and parents agree with their opinion. Pre-employment checks meet statutory requirements and ensure that staff and visitors are suitable to work with children.

Staff manage pupils' well-being meticulously because they have detailed knowledge of pupils' needs. Staff are appropriately trained to spot and report signs of a child at possible risk of harm, including risks of female genital mutilation, radicalisation and extremism. Leaders work effectively with parents, external agencies and an in-house social worker to secure support for vulnerable children and their families. Written records are of high quality and carefully maintained to monitor the help that pupils receive.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look closely at specific aspects of the school's provision. The first focus related to the area of improvement from the last inspection, which recommended that staff accurately and precisely record pupils' progress. We agreed to see how well the school's actions have addressed this issue.
- Staff rigorously track and record pupils' progress through a series of daily and termly assessments. The assessment of pupils is robust because a range of tools and strategies capture pupils' achievements in relation to their needs. These assessments are moderated with other, similar schools to check their accuracy. Teachers use pupils' assessment information effectively to update pupils' learning plans regularly. Parents appreciate receiving detailed and regular records of their child's progress.
- We also agreed to explore the progress that pupils make in a range of subjects and in their personal achievements. This would confirm whether pupils' outcomes remain outstanding, as evaluated at the previous inspection. Additionally, because of the small number of pupils at the school, published assessment information may not fully reflect all the achievements pupils make.
- We found that, from very low starting points, most pupils make consistently good or rapid progress in various subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics. Many non-verbal pupils make rapid progress in their communication skills,

including using signs and symbols with confidence. Similarly, the excellent provision for personal and social development enables pupils to make marked gains in these areas. For instance, pupils respond very well to responsibilities they are given, as demonstrated by their active participation in the school council.

- Another line of enquiry we agreed upon was to explore how the school supports pupils' behaviour and their attendance. Published information shows that the attendance of pupils is in line with the national average and we wanted to check whether this pattern was continuing.
- The care and compassion of staff are exceptional. Positive relationships exist between staff and pupils, enabling the support pupils receive to be excellent. As a result, pupils are confident and very well behaved despite their complex needs. Additionally, pupils happily work and play alongside one another. Pupils want to learn and show exemplary attitudes towards their learning.
- Overall attendance is in line with the national average and improving. Pupils enjoy being at school because the learning environment is purposeful, happy and welcoming. Staff maintain their efforts to ensure that all pupils and their parents understand how important it is to attend school. Additionally, staff keep in close communication with parents when their child is absent. Despite the school's hard work, a few pupils remain persistently absent.
- Finally, we agreed to explore the quality of the curriculum and its effect on preparing pupils for the next stage of their education.
- The curriculum is cleverly planned to provide a range of exciting activities that are appropriate to pupils' special needs and interests. Alongside reading, writing and mathematics, subjects such as understanding the world and expressive arts and design add richness to the curriculum. Staff place great emphasis on enhancing communication, independence and social skills. Pupils gain useful experiences when visiting public spaces. As a result, pupils make huge strides in developing essential life skills, including becoming increasingly self-reliant.
- The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as promoting their awareness of British values. Pupils are well prepared to succeed at the next stage of their education, including starting Year 1. Parents appreciate the various workshops related to the curriculum on offer, as these help them to support their child's learning at home.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support those few pupils who are absent for long periods so that persistent absence reduces to be at least in line with the national average.

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

published on the Ofsted website.  
Yours sincerely

Rosemarie McCarthy

**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors observed pupils' learning across all year groups, jointly with members of your leadership team. Visits to activities outside normal lessons were also made, including an assembly, and informal conversations with pupils were held during their social times. Inspectors held meetings with you and your leadership team. I met with some members of the governing body, including the chair, and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also met with middle leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils.

A range of documentation related to the school's work was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, records related to safeguarding, and the single central record of staff suitability checks. Pupils' work, assessment information and attendance records were examined.

To find out parents' views about the school, inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day and considered 11 responses expressed through Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and nine text responses. There were no responses to the pupil survey. The views of staff were evaluated through the 47 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.