

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr David Critchlow
Acting Headteacher
Lancasterian School
Elizabeth Slinger Road
West Didsbury
Manchester
M20 2XA

Dear Mr Critchlow

Short inspection of Lancasterian School

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 2018 with Kathleen McArthur, 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 April 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You, the executive headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have worked effectively to address the turmoil that Lancasterian has experienced in the last two years. By taking decisive action, you have addressed the financial difficulties you faced. You have implemented a challenging staffing restructure and actively sought to increase pupil numbers to secure the viability of the school for the future. The expertise of the executive headteacher has been a guiding light in the school's successful response to these issues. This work has ensured that the school is now in a strong position to continue its improvement, including to aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Despite the past difficulties, Lancasterian is a happy school, full of good humour and laughter. Relationships between staff and pupils are compassionate, warm and friendly. Parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, or spoke to inspectors are very positive about the school. They feel that their children are well looked after, happy and well taught. Parents would recommend Lancasterian to others without hesitation. 'I trust this school 100%,' was a typical sentiment.

Staff morale has been low in the recent past, but it is improving. Most feel proud and enjoy working at the school. Many feel that leaders are considerate of their

well-being and that they are treated fairly and with respect. There is still more work to do to fully restore the optimism of staff. Leaders have created a firm foundation on which the new headteacher can build when she takes up her position in September.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors asked you to further develop the collection and analysis of pupils' assessment information. This has been addressed for the most part. You have consistent and comprehensive systems for gathering this information and take account of a wide range of subject areas. These include English and communication, mathematics, science, and personal, social and health education. Information is meticulously collected by leaders to check the progress of pupils against their individual targets. In this way, you ensure that pupils are making progress and you can discuss possible dips in learning with teachers quickly. However, there is a great deal of information available that is not always used efficiently or effectively. Some teachers are not using assessment information to match teaching precisely to the learning needs of pupils, and so they are not making all the gains they could.

The governance of the school has suffered during the turbulence of the recent past. There is now a strong, experienced chair of governors in post. A complement of new, enthusiastic governors offer a range of valuable skills to shore up the governing body. However, the way that assessment information is presented to governors is not sufficiently detailed. This limits how well they can hold leaders to account and, where needed, challenge outcomes for pupils.

The executive headteacher along with you and the acting deputy headteacher have identified specific strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. They are not as strong as they once were. In part, this is because staff have not kept abreast of educational change as much as they should. In addition, some staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. However, this is not the case everywhere. There are pockets of teaching and learning that are matched precisely to pupils' individual needs. When this happens, activities are stimulating and spark pupils' interest, questions are asked to extend pupils' thinking and there is a high expectation that all pupils will engage in their learning and so achieve. In key stage 2, pupils were challenged to think of adjectives to describe their superheroes. Good-quality questioning extended this challenge by asking them to think of a simile. They proudly came up with, 'He's as fast as a train' and 'flies like a rocket'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given high priority. You and your team have ensured that pupils are in a safe and secure environment by promoting the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding records are thorough, detailed and reviewed regularly to ensure that they meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors undertake appropriate training which is up to date. This includes training about keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism, child sexual exploitation and neglect.

You and your safeguarding team offer the highest standard of vigilance and support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have extremely effective relationships with external agencies and are instrumental in contributing to the safeguarding of the vulnerable pupils in your care.

Pupils said that they feel very safe and well cared for. They feel confident that adults will help them if needed. Older pupils talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. Parents feel that you and the staff keep children very safe.

Inspection findings

- The assessment information that you gather on pupils provides you and staff with clear indications that the vast majority of pupils are making progress against their targets. These targets are set against an agreed progression scale, recently revised by Manchester special schools. This gives you a measure of pupils' progress from their starting points against similar pupils nationally. Most children in early years and pupils in key stages 1, 2 and 4 make good progress. Progress is less consistent in key stage 3. By the end of key stage 4, pupils are offered a personalised package of learning. When appropriate, this leads to awards, accreditations and qualifications as well as providing experiences and skills in preparation for adult life.
- You prepare young people well for the next stage of their life. You ensure that pupils follow pathways that give them the appropriate skills and knowledge to be successful and offer them practical careers guidance. All older pupils have the opportunity to complete work experience. For some pupils, this has involved working at a museum in the city or in a local supermarket. For those pupils who are not yet ready to work in the community, jobs are created within the school or in a work environment where they feel safe and secure. The good working relationship you have with colleagues in local colleges enables pupils to make a much easier transition from school. All pupils who left school last year secured a place in further education, many attending a mainstream college.
- The broad and balanced curriculum that you offer pupils is motivating and fun. Science is particularly popular with pupils. You offer a varied, imaginative learning experience that significantly contributes to developing pupils' self-belief, confidence, and personal development and life skills. For example, older pupils benefit enormously from their enterprise experiences each week in the 'coffee shop'. This offers an opportunity to bake, serve and manage the school café, which regularly welcomes parents, carers and past pupils.
- Leaders and governors recognise the great importance of good attendance for keeping pupils safe and giving them the very best opportunity to do well in school. You have thorough systems for monitoring absence. Good attendance is frequently celebrated. For some pupils, attendance is sometimes erratic for medical reasons. However, you keep careful checks on absence. The vast majority of pupils do not take time off from school without good cause. Pupils enjoy their learning and want to be in school. Parents agree, one commenting for many, 'My child loves coming to school.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to streamline the assessment information of pupils, so that it is easier for teachers to use it to plan activities that precisely match individual pupils' learning needs and next steps
- they further develop the governing body so that governors are confident to hold leaders to account, particularly about the progress that pupils make
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can learn and achieve.

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

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you, the executive headteacher and your acting deputy headteacher. We also met with members of your staff team that are responsible for key stage 4, careers and work-related learning, as well as members of your pastoral and safeguarding team. We also met with the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and met a representative of Manchester local authority. We visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. We took account of the four responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of three parents who talked with us before the school day. We took account of the 46 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke with staff during the day. We also met with two groups of pupils. We observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. We looked at school documents including: information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the work of your governing body and records relating to safeguarding.