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Mr Neill Oldham
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Dear Mr Oldham

Short inspection of Highfurlong School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 2018 with Sue Eastwood, Her Majesty's 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.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You lead an extremely warm, caring and welcoming school community which holds its pupils at the heart of all it does. Your staff team and governors are deeply committed to ensuring that pupils receive high-quality education and this commitment permeates everything you do. You became headteacher of the school very recently and have rapidly gained a clear understanding of the quality of education and the next steps to take.

Pupils love coming to school. They say that members of staff are 'amazing', 'friendly' and 'kind'. Pupils feel respected and included in decisions that are made. Equally, pupils themselves are highly respectful of one another. For example, they wait for their peers to participate in discussions and learning, explicitly valuing the contribution of each individual. The conduct of pupils throughout the inspection was exemplary.

Pupils are enthusiastic about all of the subjects they study and value the after-school opportunities such as samba dancing, cookery and youth clubs. Pupils are confident, engaged and bring a great sense of fun to their learning. They are particularly proud of the enterprise work they are involved in and have created a thriving, award-winning business.

The parents we spoke to were very supportive of the school. They said that communication with the school is very strong and that it 'would do anything' for their children. Parents feel the school supports the whole family and is making a real difference to their children's lives.

Members of staff are focused on the strengths and needs of the pupils. They are confident, skilled and open to learning new ways of working. They approach their work with professionalism and feel highly valued by leaders and governors. At the previous inspection you were asked to make it clearer to staff what they needed to do to improve by setting specific, challenging and measurable targets for them. This has been achieved. The targets that are identified with teachers and support staff during appraisal are clear, easily understood and challenge them to continuously refine and improve their practice.

You are leading the school through a period of change. The pupil population has increased significantly in the last two years and the profile of the strengths and the needs pupils present is changing. In the three weeks that you have been headteacher, you have quickly recognised the need to refine school systems. This is in order to make them more efficient and so that governors can hold you to full account. Governors and leaders at all levels recognise the need for this refinement and support your approach. The changes you have put in place are still very new and their impact is not yet known. However, you have a clear vision for developing the school further which is aligned to the underpinning ethos.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose. The school's single central record is compliant and effective safer recruitment procedures are in place. Staff training is up to date and further training and updates are provided throughout the school year. The chair of the governing body is the designated governor for safeguarding and she oversees the school's work in this area effectively.

Leaders have ensured that pupils benefit from a safe and secure environment by promoting the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Pupils' arrival in the morning and departure in the afternoon are well organised and safe practices are evident. Care and attention are given to pupils' safety around the school.

Pupils told us that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they are worried about anything. Parents say they feel their children are looked after well and safe in school. You have provided pupils and parents with a lot of useful information about online safety. Pupils are knowledgeable about this aspect of safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I shared four key lines of enquiry with you and these formed the basis of the inspection. The first of these focused on safeguarding and whether the historically high rates of absence and persistent absence had continued to decrease. Attendance has continued to improve and

you have introduced effective systems to ensure that it is even more closely monitored. You plan to further refine these new systems in order to make them more efficient.

- The second line of enquiry explored how well the curriculum meets the needs of pupils in the school. The curriculum inspires pupils to learn. You offer a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum which pupils access via the 'sensory' or the 'academic' pathway. The curriculum offers a comprehensive range of subjects in line with the national curriculum and early years foundation curriculum. The enterprise component exemplifies the high quality of the school's curriculum and provides pupils with real-life experiences which they value highly.
- The curriculum prepares pupils very well for the next phase of their education and for adult life. You ensure that pupils are appropriately matched to award-bearing courses. This means that they all achieve accreditations and qualifications by the time they leave school. All pupils move onto appropriate placements in a variety of settings according to their individual ambitions and needs.
- The next line of enquiry focused on the quality of assessment in the school and how this promoted outstanding progress for pupils. Assessment systems in the school are thorough and detailed. Assessment is used to identify the appropriate pathways for pupils and to track the progress they make in their learning. You have recognised the need to further refine systems for scrutinising pupils' work to enable you to evaluate even more precisely the strength of pupils' learning and progress over time.
- Pupils are generally making outstanding progress. Effective assessment enables the school to set individual targets for pupils which are matched well to their ability. Leaders are currently implementing new systems for assessment which take into account the broadening range of pupils' strengths and needs.
- The final line of enquiry examined how well leaders and governors had maintained the high standards of education in the school. Leaders and governors have worked well together to settle pupils into the new school building, to increase pupil numbers and to secure the financial viability of the school.
- The quality of teaching throughout the school is typically of a high standard. Teachers and support staff work very well together. Teachers know their subjects and all members of staff know the pupils very well. Teachers are skilled, innovative and work collaboratively to support and challenge one another. As a result, pupils continue to benefit from an excellent education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the planned refinements to school systems provide governors with the information they need to hold leaders even more stringently to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Hanbury
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, the assistant headteachers, middle leaders, governors, parents, pupils and members of staff. We looked at the school's website and read a range of documentation and records including the school's improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings, pupil progress reports and safeguarding documentation, including the school's single central record. We observed lessons with you and conducted learning walks with the assistant headteachers. We participated in a scrutiny of pupils' work with school leaders. We considered 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.