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5 December 2018

Ms K Lynskey
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Lynskey

Short inspection of Rowan Park School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2018 with Maggie Parker, 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 offer strong leadership that is highly valued by governors and the local authority. The school caters very effectively for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and complex physical and medical needs. Your school has a strong reputation with parents and carers and other local schools. Leaders constantly model the aspirational ethos of the school. Members of the highly effective senior leadership team work very well together to provide a safe and ambitious learning environment. There is also effective professional development, which is having a very positive effect on teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong.

The governing body knows the school and community well. Governors make a positive contribution towards continually moving the school forward. This is because they are knowledgeable and share a wide variety of skills. From a variety of sources, such as learning walks, discussions with parents and audits in their areas of responsibility, parents have developed a clear understanding of the school's priorities. Assessment information presented to governors is very detailed. This enables them to challenge leaders to ensure that pupils get the best education possible.

Parents are highly supportive of the work of the school. The vast majority who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to another parent. Pupils also value the support that they receive from staff and recognise that their needs are met. One pupil's comment, typical of others, was, 'I like it

here. We all share our differences and get along.'

During the inspection, we discussed the next steps required to enable the school to improve further. Your own self-evaluation highlights that the newly revised curriculum needs to be embedded to further improve the transition process between the end of key stage 3 and the introduction of key stage 4.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given high priority. Safeguarding records are detailed and reviewed regularly to ensure that they meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors undertake appropriate training, which is up to date. You and your safeguarding team offer the highest standard of support for pupils.

Leaders have extremely effective relationships with a range of other professionals in order to help keep pupils safe and to support them. Staff keep a close eye on pupils and take appropriate action to address any rare instances of unsafe behaviour or situations. Staff also teach both personal and online safety across the curriculum. As a result, pupils told inspectors that they feel very safe and that adults will help them if needed.

Inspection findings

- We agreed several areas of enquiry for this inspection. The first of these was looking at the effectiveness of actions taken by leaders to ensure that pupils make outstanding progress. All staff regularly check on pupils' progress. Staff assess the impact of their actions on pupils' academic success as well as their social, personal and behavioural development. Staff also pay close attention to pupils' mental health and well-being. Pupils undertake tasks with increasing levels of challenge. This enables them to progress and deepen their levels of understanding over a wide range of subjects in all key stages. Pupils also develop the skills to self-regulate their behaviour and emotions, thereby improving their ability to work independently. Teaching assistants are highly effective because they are knowledgeable about pupils' academic and personal development. Teaching assistants skilfully question pupils to develop their thinking. All staff have high expectations of pupils. For example, in physical therapy, pupils spoke to adults in French while using equipment. Evidence through learning walks and pupils' work seen in files shows very strong gains in knowledge and understanding in all areas assessed.
- The next area we looked at was the effectiveness of assessment, especially in informing procedures for the transition into and out of school. Senior and middle leaders regularly review assessment information. As a result, pupils' targets link very closely to their social, academic and sensory needs. Middle leaders have very good knowledge of the progress that pupils are making in their subjects due to the effective assessment systems that they have created. These include measuring the progress across English, communication, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education.
- Transition arrangements both into and out of school are highly effective. Leaders meet pupils in their own school setting. Pupils begin to attend for increased amounts of time, resulting in attendance for full days. A prospectus designed especially for

pupils provides them with valuable information about the school. You also offer pupils practical careers guidance. Leaders follow up placements and review effectiveness to inform future decisions. All older pupils have opportunities to complete work experience. For some pupils, this has involved working at supermarkets or garden centres. 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, for example buying and selling food in the school shop. Pupils are as well prepared as possible, given their starting points, for the next stage of their life. However, the newly reviewed curriculum for key stage 3 is still being developed in relation to the opportunities for transition work, including work placements from a wider variety of employers.

- The next area we looked at was how effective leaders' work has been to improve the attendance of pupils. You have thorough systems for monitoring absence. Good attendance is frequently celebrated. For some pupils, attendance is sometimes irregular for medical reasons. For these pupils, staff provide work at home. This ensures that pupils continue to make progress. It also guarantees that regular contact is maintained with pupils and their families. Pupils enjoy their learning and want to be in school. One parental comment was, 'My child loves school so much that [they] want to come at the weekend.' This was typical of the views of other parents with whom the inspectors spoke.
- We looked at the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting pupils' needs. You offer a varied, imaginative learning experience that significantly contributes to developing pupils' self-belief, their confidence and personal development and life skills. Leaders match the curriculum precisely to pupils' individual needs. As a result, activities are interesting and there is a high expectation that all pupils will participate in their learning in all subjects and, therefore, achieve well. Pupils also learn about British values, including democracy. For example, the school election system for school counsellors involves creating a manifesto and giving a speech to other pupils. The school council has been responsible for putting on dances, deciding on meals for cookery courses and requesting resources from leaders to enhance pupils' learning. Staff also provide a range of enrichment activities. These include visits away from school, including places of worship, which develop necessary life skills. Pupils have the opportunity to attend a residential holiday, where they can develop their independence, try out new skills and develop their communication skills with their friends. Pupils also write about the experience through a diary. This develops their English skills across a range of subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the new curriculum for key stage 3 pupils to provide increased opportunities for transition work to key stage 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hunter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils about their work and school life, both formally and informally. Inspectors held meetings with you and also spoke with senior staff to discuss improvements in their areas of responsibility. We visited classrooms, jointly with you or your deputy headteacher, to observe pupils' learning. I also spoke with the teaching schools' operational director and a representative from the local authority.

We scrutinised pupils' work to evaluate their learning over time. We spoke with parents and took account of 18 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 18 free-text responses. We also took account of 43 responses to the online staff questionnaire.

We looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, external reviews and information about pupils' progress. We also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including: policies to keep children safe; records of training; safeguarding checks; and attendance and behaviour information. I also undertook a review of the school's website.