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Ms Clare Barden
Headteacher
Penwith Alternative Provision Academy
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Dear Ms Barden

Short inspection of Penwith Alternative Provision Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019 with Stephen McShane HMI, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

Directors of the multi-academy trust have created a community of similar schools and mechanisms for leaders to work in close collaboration, both together as a team and with leaders from local mainstream schools. This partnership working supports you and your staff well. Leaders of local schools and the local authority talk of how successful the school is, 'going above and beyond', in supporting pupils to cope with their anxieties. The high numbers of pupils who return to local schools successfully shows how effective the school's work is.

You have a strong vision for the school which you articulate clearly and consistently. Staff describe your leadership as 'inspirational'. They feel valued, supported and trusted to do all they can to help pupils to do well. Your focus is on understanding why pupils behave as they do and helping them to discover ways of managing themselves in more positive ways.

At the previous inspection, the area for improvement was to widen opportunities so that pupils learn about life beyond their immediate environment. Pupils now have opportunities to learn in a variety of settings beyond school. For example, the recent trip to France allowed pupils to explore how people live in another country. Staff help pupils to learn about different cultures and about current events happening around the world. As a result, pupils have a growing awareness and respect for the different ways that people live their lives, and this prepares them well for their lives beyond school.

Pupils receive careers support that is tailored to their developing interests. They are encouraged to visit colleges and seek out courses. Nearly all pupils who left Year 11 last year remain in successful education or training placements. Pupils develop a belief in themselves, an inner confidence and expectation that they can be successful. However, you ensure that nothing is left to chance, and the recently introduced assessment system enables staff to track pupils' attitudes and aspirations. This means that staff identify any weaker aspects and support pupils with these.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and pupils are clear about their responsibilities and there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Safeguarding is part of practice across the school. The motivational briefing at the start of the day reminds staff about any issues linked to safeguarding. Risk assessments are detailed and are of high quality.

The school's family support team works to build relations with families. As well as providing families with guidance and support, this improves the school's understanding of pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that agencies are involved, and everything is done that can be when concerns are raised. Governors have a strong understanding of good safeguarding practice. They check to make sure that safeguarding arrangements are secure.

Part of what the school does so well is helping pupils to understand what they need to do to keep themselves safe, to manage their own emotions better and to have strategies to know how to cope when things go wrong. Pupils feel safe, and one astute pupil said, 'This is the first place that I have been able to talk to teachers'.

Inspection findings

- We looked at how well the curriculum is shaped to meet the often-complex needs of pupils. Together with your leadership team, you have reviewed the curriculum plan. It mirrors a mainstream curriculum, which helps pupils with their learning experiences as they move back to mainstream schools. There are clear statements that precisely describe the skills and knowledge you want pupils to gain that perhaps they have not managed in the past, for example statements that describe pupils' attitudes, resilience and social skills. This clarity helps staff to respond to each pupil by creating bespoke learning experiences for them.
- There are interesting experiences built into pupils' learning, including opportunities for music, horse riding and surfing. As a result, pupils can find new areas to achieve well in. They start to see successes, and this motivates them to achieve even more.
- Pupils' achievements are recorded in detail on the school's assessment system. Using this information, staff plan learning activities which are based on pupils' existing gaps in knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils make good progress and are well equipped for their return to mainstream.

- The curriculum, particularly the primary curriculum, continues to be a focus for further development. Pupils' books show that learning activities in mathematics and writing are, at times, limited. For example, there are few opportunities for pupils to reason and solve problems using their number skills or to use their writing skills to create poetry.
- We explored how leaders, including trust leaders and governors, work together to provide strong leadership that supports the school well. The chief executive officer, supported by the school improvement partner, knows the school well, visiting often. Trust leaders spot talent and provide staff with opportunities to pursue areas they are interested in and develop their leadership skills. Governors who form the management committee also visit often and bring their expertise to support the leadership team. The school's subject leaders have a solid understanding of their subjects.
- The strong links between leaders result in a team of leaders who work as one. They share the same goals and aspirations for pupils. They also have an accurate view of what the school does well and what it needs to improve further. The school improvement plan provides details about the school's priorities. However, the plan does not show how or when improvements will be seen over time. This makes it harder for governors to closely challenge the work of the school.
- Parents and pupils express their appreciation of how the school is helping them. As a parent said, 'the school involves us, and I couldn't speak more highly of the support for my child.' Exclusions are decreasing, as are serious behaviour incidents. When asked about the school, one pupil explained, 'There is less stress here, you can achieve more.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school improvement plan includes clear milestones and timelines
- pupils are challenged more often to apply the skills they learn, particularly in mathematics and writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Wave multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, senior leaders joined inspectors observing learning in classes and looking at pupils' work. Meetings were held with you, your senior leaders, a group of subject leaders and the school's improvement partner. I met with the chief executive officer of the trust and the assistant headteacher of a local school who is the chair of the management committee and a member of the school's pupil performance steering group. I also spoke to a representative from Cornwall local authority who works with you to place pupils at the school.

Inspectors observed pupils in classes, at break and lunch times. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and their understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's own analyses of strengths and weaknesses, curriculum and assessment information, risk assessments and staff recruitment checks.

An inspector spoke with parents and carers on the telephone in order to gather their views. No views were expressed on Parent View. No pupils completed the Ofsted's online survey. The 22 surveys completed by staff were taken into account.