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Mrs Jacqueline Wheble
Head of School
Pictor Academy
Grove Lane
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Dear Mrs Wheble

Short inspection of Pictor Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019 with Linda Griffiths, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in January 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders and trustees continuously strive to improve the educational experiences of every pupil. Your clear vision is shared by the whole school community. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One comment typifies the thoughts of many: 'Really great school, love the atmosphere and attitude of the teachers who all have the pupils' best interests at heart. In sometimes challenging situations, they ensure that all children are helped in achieving their full potential.'

The range of pupils' needs has expanded since the previous inspection. There are now a small number of pupils with complex needs who attend the school. Leaders were swift to respond to this change. They have installed specialist equipment, resources and outside spaces to support the physical and learning needs of these pupils. In one classroom, a hoist has been fitted to allow pupils to move seamlessly from the classroom to the bathroom. Additional sensory spaces using light, sound and textures are used expertly to meet the sensory needs of pupils very effectively. You and your staff know the needs of every pupil extremely well and support each one to achieve the very best they possibly can. As a result, pupils are happy and confident, and thrive in school.

You have worked well to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection of the predecessor school. Middle leaders and teachers have worked together to design and implement a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. A

full range of topics has given greater breadth to the curriculum. Teachers understand the small steps of progress required for pupils of lower ability. They ensure that each topic is adapted to meet the varying needs of the pupils. Consequently, teaching is highly personalised and effective. Teachers are skilled in adapting their teaching in order to respond to opportunities to challenge and extend pupils' learning. For example, when a pupil was distracted using the internet, the teacher skilfully diverted the learning and linked it to geography. At another time, when it started to snow, pupils were encouraged to put their coats on, go outside and share this experience. Pupils' fine motor skills were developed well by pupils spreading out their fingers to create foam rainbows on a table.

Teachers now set very precise and personalised targets for every pupil. Targets are available in every classroom and are used as working documents to record individual progress. The progress made by pupils since joining the school is clearly visible in pupils' books and learning records. Most pupils make very strong progress from their starting points. Records also show how pupils have improved their physical, social and academic skills. Some pupils have progressed from having very little mobility to walking unaided. Other pupils have progressed from being socially isolated to managing to work in small groups.

There is a clear focus on developing pupils' reading, writing and number skills across the school. In pupils' books, the development of number and writing skills over time is clearly evident. This was also observed during the inspection. For example, pupils were moving from knowing and writing their numbers from one to 10 to being able to complete simple calculations. Staff use every opportunity to develop pupils' personal, social, emotional and physical skills. Pupils enjoyed a dance class where they were encouraged to extend their physical movement and balance. In addition, during snack time, some pupils used pretend money to pay for a snack and also learned to be patient and stand in a queue.

You are ambitious to further develop your revised curriculum model and the assessment system that accompanies it. Inspection evidence shows that these are already beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, developments are not yet fully embedded, and so there is scope for some pupils to make even stronger progress across a wider range of subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. The school's record of the required checks on members of staff is compliant and thorough. The designated safeguarding lead responds quickly to any concerns. She is tenacious in following up any referrals. This includes referrals to the local authority or other agencies when required.

The culture of safeguarding in school is strong. Staff training is up to date and robust. As a result, staff know the signs and symptoms of abuse and are quick to report any concerns. Policies and procedures are thorough and form the basis of

work to keep children safe. The family worker works with families who need early help and also refers to other agencies if needed.

Risk assessments across a range of situations are detailed and take account of all potential risks. The assessments are used effectively to maintain safe practice across the school. This includes residential activities, driving the minibus and dealing with any behavioural concerns.

Inspection findings

- One of the key lines of enquiry I explored with you was around pupils' behaviour. Your systems and procedures within school are very effective in managing pupils' behaviour. The staff know pupils very well and consequently are able to act quickly when behaviour is a cause for concern. Staff are skilled at using strategies to distract or deflect a situation. This helps to de-escalate any problematic behaviour and support pupils back into learning. Pupils are treated as individuals. Staff take time to work with parents to find out what will work with their children to make positive changes. Parents speak highly of the support they receive from the school and the positive impact this has had on the personal progress of their children. Leaders analyse patterns of behaviour for individuals as well as the behaviour of particular groups. Leaders intervene to support and improve behaviour if required. For example, you noticed that there was a small increase in incidents at lunchtime. An additional member of staff was deployed, with the result that the number of incidents decreased. With personalised help and support, pupils learn how to manage their behaviour and emotions. The knowledge of staff, combined with the strategies deployed, has ensured that pupils' behaviour in this school is outstanding.
- I also considered how effectively the pupil premium funding is used. Leaders identified that communication was a barrier to disadvantaged pupils' learning and progress. Leaders use some of the funding to offer additional speech and language support for pupils in order for them to benefit from one-to-one support. The speech and language therapy team also trained teaching assistants, so that the support was threaded throughout the school. The school's visual communication system allows pupils to communicate in a variety of ways, including using visual images, signs and symbols, as well as communicating verbally. Pupils have ownership of their chosen method. There are personalised resources to help each pupil to ask and answer questions, talk about their day or contribute to a discussion. The whole-school focus on communication has a significant impact on the progress and personal development of this group of pupils. In addition, the assessment system shows that all disadvantaged pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding achieved their targets in the last academic year. Pupil premium funding is used very well at the school and enables disadvantaged pupils to make strong progress.
- Another line of enquiry concerned pupils' attendance. Leaders monitor and track attendance closely and are quick to act when patterns of poor attendance emerge. The family support worker works closely with families to identify and overcome any barriers to regular attendance. The support is very personalised and staff are creative in finding solutions to any problems. Pupils' attendance is

improving as a result. The school does have a higher than average level of persistent absence. This is the result of a small number of pupils who have long-term medical needs, which limit the amount of time they can spend in school.

- My final line of enquiry looked at how well prepared pupils were for their next stage of education. Leaders start the transition to secondary school in Year 5. This ensures that there is plenty of time to work with parents, carers and pupils to make an informed choice. It also allows for a seamless transition into secondary education. Strong partnerships with feeder secondary schools result in a programme of visits, meetings and personalised support. This excellent transition work makes sure that the new schools have all the necessary information they need to meet each pupil's needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to develop and embed their updated curriculum and assessment model, so that pupils make even stronger progress in a broader range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Bather
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and senior leaders. They held a meeting with four members of the trust, including the chief executive officer. Inspectors met with the safeguarding leads and scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the record of checks completed on staff. Visits to classes and other areas were undertaken and pupils' books were scrutinised. There were 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and inspectors met with six parents. Inspectors took account of the 42 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff, spoke to staff during the day and also met formally with a small group of staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils informally during the day and met formally with six pupils. Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Documents were scrutinised, including: information about pupils' progress; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; records of pupils' attendance; and information relating to the work of the trust.