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Mrs Karen Hamilton
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Dear Mrs Hamilton

Short inspection of Sir Charles Parsons School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019 with Zoe Westley, 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 March 2015.

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 the school with quiet determination, a strong moral compass and a deep level of commitment for the pupils and staff in your care. You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and senior team; your senior leaders are experienced and flexible. You have ensured that they understand how the school works 'as a whole'. As a result, they are able to support each other whatever their prescribed area of responsibility is. The quality of leadership is, therefore, unaffected by any changes in personnel.

The curriculum at school is highly responsive to the needs of your pupils. Indeed, your school is leading developments in curriculum and assessment for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in your local area. The vision for your curriculum is both sensible and compelling. Having reconsidered the purpose of schooling for your pupils, you developed a series of 'desired outcomes for education'. Here, you reflected upon the needs of the pupils in your care and developed a set of criteria by which you can judge your own success. These outcomes are designed to be shaped around the needs of individuals, and support both those pupils with the most complex needs and those pupils in your school who are relatively high attainers.

Pupils at your school are taught in mixed-ability groups. They move around school and study separate subjects, mirroring how the curriculum is delivered in a typical

mainstream secondary school. Teachers are highly skilled at ensuring that planning matches the needs of the pupils in the classes that they teach. A layered approach is taken. There is a core curriculum offer. Pupils who benefit from additional support access the 'personalised learning curriculum' which offers individual help and pushes pupils to reach even higher standards. Other pupils learn through a sensory curriculum. Additional therapies help these pupils to develop their physical skills and support them with any physical disabilities that they may have.

Teaching at your school is characterised by strong planning that is delivered within a supportive and focused environment. Teachers are effective at considering individual pupils' needs, as outlined in their education, health and care (EHC) plans, and contextualising these within the subject being studied. Teachers use 'pen portraits' well. Your vision is to ensure that any qualifications on offer are matched to the 'desired outcomes for education'. As a result, these qualifications enhance the curriculum rather than drive it. The focus of teachers is not on completing accreditations but on deepening pupils' learning.

Your focus on 'desired outcomes for education' is also central to your careers programme. There is a strong focus at school on exposing pupils to the world of work. A high proportion of pupils engage in work experience programmes. A system of internships also helps pupils get ready for life after school. As a result, the vast majority of your pupils leave school increasingly prepared for adulthood. Few leave without places in education, employment or further training.

You know your school very well. Development plans build on your school's strengths and concentrate on any areas that require further focus. Systems that are in place to check the quality of teaching feed directly into development programmes for staff. Morale is high, partly due to the way members of staff are encouraged to develop their craft, and partly because you overtly reward their efforts.

The previous inspection report identified the need to ensure that pupils know how well they have done in a subject and what they will need to learn next. Members of your team developed a coloured 'how is my learning?' system as a result. It is used consistently well across school. Pupils reflect on how much progress that they are making and think about what their next steps are. Similarly, your focus on developing pupils' writing skills across the curriculum continues to have a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making in this subject. This was also noted as a relative weakness in the last inspection.

However, you are not complacent. Inspectors noted that most-able pupils' needs are not always fully met and that they do not always reach the standards of which they are capable. You had already identified this as an area in which to improve. Plans are already in place to further support these pupils.

One parent captured the views of many when responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire. This parent wrote, 'Mrs Hamilton and her staff are outstanding. They are constantly developing new and better ways to help all students enjoy, learn and achieve. Our son is happy, secure and confident. We

could not ask for more.'

Safeguarding is effective.

What inspectors saw during breaktime encapsulates the culture of safeguarding at your school. Here, pupils were seen to be happy, supportive of each other and keen to tell us how much they enjoy school. Staff helped pupils to engage in games and other social activities. The pupil whose birthday it was chose the music that was playing in the background; several pupils were dancing. There was a delightful buzz which highlighted the joy and happiness that permeates school. This evidence showed us that not only are pupils safe, but they are in a place in which they can thrive.

Pupils are kind and courteous. They understand the need to behave well in class and when moving around the building. Pupils are confident that if any unkind words are ever used, or that if anyone is ever being bullied, adults in school would help sort it out immediately. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school. Parents and staff agree.

Other strategies that you use underline your focus on keeping pupils safe and developing them into rounded citizens. Particularly useful for younger pupils is the way in which learning is presented in lessons. Pupils are encouraged to focus on 'my thinking, myself and my learning'. These 'behaviours for life and learning' knit together the need for pupils to be emotionally ready to learn as well as focusing on the task in hand.

Policies used to keep pupils safe are effective, and staff training is up to date. Safeguarding procedures are alive at school and are understood by staff. There is a tenacity around ensuring that more vulnerable pupils are supported. School leaders are proactive in working with outside agencies in order to keep pupils safe and secure. This includes agencies which support pupils with SEND specifically.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I wanted to check on the extent to which the curriculum supports pupils to make outstanding progress. Of note here is the way in which you have organised the curriculum for sixth-form students. Your team identifies students that would benefit from greater integration in mainstream schools in order to prepare them for life after sixth form. Two classes of your students are based at the local secondary academy. Here, they not only make strides in their academic studies, but the different context also prepares them well for adulthood.
- Students based at the local secondary academy are taught with students from that school and socialise with them. They wear the uniform from that school with pride. They are part of the fabric of the school and integral to their sixth form. You have thought deeply about the needs of these students and have thought outside the box in order to deliver wider outcomes that support these young people. They develop in confidence, make new friends, and become more

independent.

- I also wanted to find out whether the strengths in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as highlighted in the previous inspection were still present at school. There are many strengths in the quality of teaching. You and your team are constantly wanting to improve teaching and develop consistent approaches. The use of sign and symbols to support communication with pupils is an example of this. A reflective approach and a constant refining of provision is helping pupils to navigate their learning at school.
- Where pupils benefit from sensory approaches to learning, these are highly effective in meeting the needs of these pupils. You and your team work well with health professionals to support pupils who need this additional support. There is a 'clear line of sight' between pupils' EHC plans and the provision that they receive.
- You make a concerted effort to make the content covered in lessons relevant to pupils' interests and ages. During the inspection, pupils were seen to be engaging in Italian culture, for example. They were practising simple phrases in Italian and developing their cooking skills. Those pupils benefiting from a sensory approach were smelling Italian foods and listening to Italian music.
- One of my areas of focus was the quality of leadership at school. In addition to the strength of senior and middle leaders is the quality of governance. Members of the governing body are committed and knowledgeable. They support senior leaders and also ask probing questions to ensure that the quality of education on offer is as good as it can be. They are very proud of their school.
- Your assessment systems are both accurate and comprehensive. They link to your curriculum in a coherent manner. Indeed, the system that you have developed is being used by other schools to inform their practice. As a result of these systems, you can pinpoint exactly where pupils are making strong progress and where any additional intervention needs to take place. This is one of the bedrocks upon which you have built the outstanding education on offer at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the needs of most-able pupils' are consistently well met and that an even greater proportion reach the standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector
Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and members of your senior leadership team. Inspectors met a group of middle leaders and a group of teachers and support staff. You, together with your deputy headteacher, presented information detailing pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan. An inspector spoke with colleagues responsible for safeguarding and attendance. I spoke with four members of the governing body, including the chair. You, your deputy headteacher and the school's lead practitioner joined inspectors as we observed teaching and learning across the school. I also observed your sixth-form students being taught in the local secondary academy where they study. An inspector met with a group of pupils at lunchtime and we spoke to other pupils at breaktime. We reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and different classes. I discussed the school's effectiveness with a representative of the local authority. We also reviewed a wide variety of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website. I also considered the 17 responses to Parent View.