

21 February 2019

Mr Craig Drummond
Deputy Headteacher
Heathermount School
Devenish Road
Ascot
Berkshire
SL5 9PG

Dear Mr Drummond

Short inspection of Heathermount School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2019 with Catherine Davies, 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 good in January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Leaders have continued to drive forward improvements, and these are having a positive impact on the lives of the pupils at this school.

Staff have a deep understanding of the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder. This led to the school gaining the internationally recognised Autism Accreditation in 2018. Skilled staff give pupils the support they need to make impressive progress. 'This isn't a school, it's much more, we are a family,' was the response from one pupil, when asked about the school. Pupils told inspectors how much they had changed since attending Heathermount. One pupil summed this up by saying: 'I am transformed because of this school. I was seen as a bad student at my previous school because of my autism, but here I am a star.'

Parents and carers say that the school has helped their children to thrive. They talked of the improvements they have seen in their children's self-esteem and aspirations. Parents praise the talents of staff. One parent summed this up, stating, 'We are very lucky and grateful to have the opportunity to send our son to Heathermount.'

Leaders have ensured that the school's 14 acres of grounds are well used to improve pupils' well-being. When pupils are feeling anxious, for example, they can visit the well-designed sensory garden. This helps them to calm down in a safe and natural environment. 'Forest school' helps pupils to appreciate the different species

of mature trees, such as the giant sequoias, that grow in the grounds. Pupils enjoy learning about wildlife through activities such as bird watching and pond dipping. The horticultural areas, such as the poly-tunnels, are very well used. Pupils spoke proudly of the gardening techniques they had learned, such as how to plant seeds and grow vegetables. Drama is a strength of your school. It is used to develop pupils' social skills well and encourages them to take risks in a safe and caring space. During the inspection, pupils were rehearsing monologues on the stage to gain accreditation awards from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Pupils showed considerable sensitivity about the feelings of others when they were discussing each other's work.

The previous inspection identified a couple of areas to address. The first of these was to accelerate pupils' progress in lessons. You have addressed this area effectively. As leaders, you check the work in pupils' books regularly. Pupils make strong progress because staff plan work that matches their needs. You make sure that extra support is provided for any pupil whose progress is less than strong. The other area to address from the previous inspection was about the amount of homework set. You now have a clear homework policy. Around three quarters of the parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, now consider that homework is appropriate to the needs of their children.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff and governors have a deep understanding of the needs of pupils. They work hard to ensure that pupils feel nurtured and safe. The designated safeguarding leads are very aware of potential issues. They have trained staff well in the procedures they need to follow, should they have any concerns. There is good liaison with a range of outside agencies. This ensures that pupils receive appropriate and prompt support.

Leaders are always looking at ways to improve the safety of pupils. For example, they have recently improved the safety of the area where pupils are collected at the end of the school day. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies are detailed and are well implemented. There are comprehensive arrangements in place to ensure the safe recruitment of staff. The school's single central record of recruitment checks is well maintained.

Pupils say that they feel safe at the school. They know whom to speak to if they ever have any worries. Pupils say that although bullying happens occasionally, staff are quick to sort it out.

Inspection findings

- A focus of the inspection was the impact of leaders on improving the school. We found that yours is a proactive team whose members are always looking to further improve. Your new assessment system, for example, provides a clear overview of pupils' skills and abilities when they enter the school. We did note, however, that some aspects of the school's record keeping are not always systematic or accessible. This was illustrated in the monitoring of attendance

information, which is recorded in several different ways, so it is not easy for you to check attendance efficiently.

- Governors are effective in holding leaders to account. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas left to develop. They often visit classrooms and talk to pupils to find out their views of the school. Governors check the use of funding, such as pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding, effectively.
- We looked at how well pupils are progressing in your school. We found that pupils make good progress across a range of subjects. Skills in English and mathematics are well developed. Pupils typically obtain a range of accreditations from entry level to level 2.
- Different groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, do well. Those who are most able are given work that is challenging and, as a result, they make good progress. In mathematics, for example, some pupils are able to solve complex problems by changing them into a series of mathematical processes. Some past pupils have achieved high grades in their GCSEs.
- We considered how well the curriculum meets the needs of the pupils. We found that your school offers a stimulating and meaningful curriculum. Pupils can study many different subjects. Many said how much they enjoy their art lessons and developing their creative talents.
- Staff, including the team of therapists, rightly pride themselves on how well this school helps pupils to reduce and manage their levels of anxiety. Staff develop bespoke plans to support each pupil's emotional self-regulation. Pupils' social communication skills are well developed. Past pupils who are now tutors at the school are role models that current pupils aspire to emulate. This is particularly the case for those pupils with low self-esteem.
- Pupils are prepared well for their future lives. Older pupils, including those who are now post-16, enjoy learning about business administration. Catering skills are well developed and students enjoy cooking food for the whole school.
- Support for pupils' next steps towards employment, including careers advice and guidance, is strong. All post-16 students, on leaving the school, go on to further education, employment or training. Currently, however, the range of work experience opportunities offered to pupils is rather limited.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's record-keeping systems are developed to improve their efficiency and better support leadership
- pupils benefit from a broader range of work experience opportunities.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Bowes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and other members of the senior leadership team. There was a meeting with the chair of governors. The headteacher was not available during the inspection. Discussions were held with a group of pupils, and 15 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for pupils were also considered. Inspectors, with members of the senior leadership team, visited all the classes and looked at pupils' books and portfolios.

We took into consideration 16 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including 12 free-text comments. A range of the school's documentation was scrutinised, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for improvement; assessment, behaviour and exclusion information; the single central record of recruitment checks; policies and procedures; and minutes of the governing body's meetings.