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Ms J Westlake  
Acting Headteacher  
Kilgarth School  
Cavendish Street  
Birkenhead  
Merseyside  
CH41 8BA

Dear Ms Westlake

### **Short inspection of Kilgarth School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019 with Ian Hardman, Her Majesty's 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 Kilgarth 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. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher took up their posts in January 2019 following the secondment of the substantive headteacher to a senior position within another setting. The transition has been seamless. The executive headteacher and governors have ensured that leadership has remained strong at all levels. The acting headteacher is well established in the school and has the respect and support of her colleagues. The considerable contribution made by all leaders has enabled the school to grow from strength to strength.

Since the previous inspection, Kilgarth has become a member of the Aspire Schools Federation with Gilbrook, a primary social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) specialist primary school. The leadership team at Kilgarth also provides support to a local authority pupil referral unit. Staff have also played an increasingly influential role in supporting colleagues in other mainstream and special schools as a strategic partner within the Weatherhead Teaching School Alliance.

The governing body provides clear strategic leadership and offers firm support and challenge to you and your staff. Governors are experienced, knowledgeable and frequent visitors to the school. Governors share your ambition for your pupils. They are fully in favour of the efforts made by leaders to share expertise with other schools in a collegiate response to the growing numbers of pupils with SEMH concerns across the local authority.

Relationships are the key to success at Kilgarth. You and your colleagues start to form strong relationships with pupils and their families before they start school. It is of great importance to you that pupils get off to the best possible start to their education at Kilgarth. Staff skilfully tailor transition arrangements to the individual needs of pupils. As a result, pupils experience a positive start.

Your pupils and their families are of the opinion that your school transforms lives. For many pupils who have been out of education for some time, starting at Kilgarth has been a 'game changer' and the positive impact on their education is substantial. Parents and carers talk about the positive difference you make, not only to their children but also to their families. Parents and pupils appreciate the way that you and your staff take the time to get to know them, see the potential of pupils and nurture their talents and interests. One parent commented that staff 'deserve a medal'.

Your ambition for pupils is infectious. Pupils talked to inspectors about their plans for the future, which included applying for college to study creative media, beginning an IT apprenticeship and finding a job as a bricklayer or an electrician.

Leaders have created a positive climate for learning and personal development. Staff morale is high and staff buy in to the vision and ambition that leaders have for the school. Staff appreciate the opportunities provided for professional development and there is a clear pathway for career progression.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked you to strengthen and refine school improvement planning and evaluation systems. Leaders produce a very detailed action plan which focuses on accurate areas for improvement. Where relevant, there are examples of measurable success criteria, although these could be refined even further. The improvement plans clearly identify the personnel responsible for actions. Governors regularly use the school improvement plan to evaluate progress to date and to hold senior leaders to account for their actions.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's work to keep pupils safe is exemplary and you provide a haven for the pupils who attend your school.

Leaders ensure that adults who work at the school are checked appropriately and receive a thorough induction into the school. Your team makes sure that it keeps meticulous records, so that nothing is missed. You are tenacious in seeking the most appropriate support for pupils and their families. Any concerns raised by staff, parents or pupils are followed up quickly by senior leaders. If you consider that referrals to other services are not addressed effectively, you escalate your concerns to the highest levels, without delay.

You and your staff build positive relationships with pupils, quickly gaining their trust and confidence. You go to great lengths to understand what might be causing worry or anxieties for your pupils. Staff skilfully employ a range of de-escalation strategies so that low-level behaviours do not become challenging. Staff also know how to use safe physical intervention techniques, but are clear that these are only used as a last

resort. Incidents of challenging behaviour are well-documented and staff value daily briefing sessions which enable them to discuss individual pupils and agree the most effective ways to support them.

Pupils report that they feel safe and are confident that bullying does not happen at Kilgarth. They develop a keen awareness of how to keep safe through the school's 'life skills' curriculum. For example, pupils learn about the dangers of knives, laws about buying and carrying knives, prison sentences for knife crime and how to report a concern. As a result, pupils are better prepared for life beyond school.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed some key lines of enquiry. The first line of enquiry was to focus on how well the curriculum is matched to pupils' individual needs to secure strong outcomes. Despite the limitations of the school buildings, leaders have developed a broad curriculum offer which enables pupils to study for a range of qualifications and vocational accreditations. The average number of qualifications achieved at the end of Year 11 has increased from 4.5 to 9 over the past three years. Opportunities are provided for pupils to experience different courses and to change direction if necessary. This flexible approach ensures that pupils continue to engage in learning and attend regularly.
- Leaders recognise quickly when a minority of pupils are not succeeding with academic study. You have developed a vocational study route (the 'flexible learning programme') which operates alongside pupils gaining academic qualifications. This programme has positively increased pupils' attendance and engagement. Work in pupils' books shows strong progress due to the personalised approach and support for individual needs. Pupils working through the programme also spend much time preparing for the next stage of their learning once they leave Kilgarth.
- Staff identify any difficulties that pupils have in learning and agree with pupils a range of strategies that will best support them. Pupil-centred plans are known and understood by all staff, resulting in highly effective support which secures pupils' engagement in learning. The majority of pupils make significant progress across the curriculum. Support staff skilfully get pupils back on track in lessons and provide just the right level of support to ensure that pupils are successful.
- The other line of enquiry focused on how well leaders prepare pupils for adulthood. This includes how leaders are reducing the numbers of pupils who are not in education, employment or training once they leave the school. Leaders and staff leave no stone unturned to prepare pupils as well as they can to continue their success once they leave Kilgarth. Pupils have a good understanding of the entry routes to the courses they have chosen for further education and to enter the world of work. They understand what the minimum course requirements are and work hard to achieve the qualifications needed.
- Transition arrangements to college are robust and are extended over a longer period of time, as appropriate to individual need. Staff work closely with colleagues in further education settings to provide relevant information to ensure a successful start. Although the vast majority of pupils go on to further study or training, some pupils are unable to remain in these placements in the long term. Often, this is

because pupils do not continue to receive the strong support they have grown accustomed to. The breakdown in pupils' placements post-16 continues to be a cause of frustration for leaders and they are researching ways to improve positive outcomes for pupils when they leave the school.

- Leaders have invested a significant amount of time into research about the most effective approaches to modify inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour. All members of the school community fully support the ethos of non-confrontational management of pupils' behaviour. As a result, the number of incidents of challenging behaviour has reduced over time.
- Pupils rise to the high expectations that staff have of their behaviour and engagement in learning. Staff take time to listen to pupils in an effort to better understand their needs and issues. Pupils also develop their understanding of the impact of their actions on the well-being of others. Consequently, there is a sense of calm around the school and there has been a reduction in the need for physical restraint and exclusions.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work closely with external partners and further education providers to improve the success of placements when pupils leave the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Beard  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and members of your senior leadership team. We also met with members of the governing body. We spoke with a representative from the local authority special educational needs and/or disabilities team, an educational psychologist and a consultant from Goldsmiths University. We talked informally with pupils around the school and met formally with a group of pupils and teaching assistants.

You and other leaders accompanied us on visits to classes, where we observed teaching and learning. We observed teaching and learning in all classes, including the flexible learning programme group. We also looked at work in pupils' books.

We examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. We

also scrutinised a range of policies and the school improvement plan. Inspectors also looked at the school's website.

There were no responses to the pupil survey and no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered the results from the school's parental questionnaire, as well as two comments received by Ofsted's free-text facility.