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8 May 2019

Mr Pierre Coiffait
Head of School
Hawthorns School
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Dear Mr Coiffait

Short inspection of Hawthorns School

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 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 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. Your school has had significant changes in leadership since that inspection. The school has moved from being a member of the Enquire multi-academy trust and joined the New Bridge multi-academy trust. The headteacher and executive principal at the time of the last inspection have both left the school. You joined the school in May 2018. These changes all occurred in a short period of time.

Governors described how the changes were carefully managed. Staff explained how you had continued to build on the strengths of the previous leadership team. Parents and carers spoken to during the inspection all stated that the changes had not affected their children's education. After all these significant changes the quality of education has remained outstanding.

You have a clear vision for your school. This is that pupils will develop socially and emotionally while attending your school. You believe strongly that, as a result, they will then be able to achieve academically. Staff and governors share your vision. Parents also understand this vision. Parents were able to give examples of how their children's learning and self-esteem had developed, typically commenting that: 'My child has progressed academically beyond anything we could have expected. It's incredible what they have achieved.'

Staff are proud to work at the school. The development of staff is a major priority of the school and is central to its success. All staff are fully trained to support the pupils. This has become of increasing importance. Pupil numbers have increased significantly

since the last inspection and have a widening range of needs. Staff work closely with parents to support pupils to develop as individuals. Parents I spoke with during the inspection valued the excellent quality of communication with staff.

High-quality teaching enables pupils to make excellent progress. Your staff have an exceptionally detailed understanding of each pupil's needs. They use this knowledge effectively to produce challenging lessons. Clear communication ensures that pupils understand what they need to do. Skilful use of resources gives all pupils the opportunity to take part in learning. Support staff are very effectively deployed. This ensures that every pupil receives the help they need to learn effectively. Pupils make excellent progress, both in their academic and personal development.

At the time of the previous inspection leaders were asked to ensure that pupils achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. All staff received in-depth training in developing pupils' independent writing skills. Teachers and support staff have become more confident in challenging pupils to write independently. Teachers now support each other in developing writing. Pupils are now encouraged to reflect on how to improve their writing. A literacy co-ordinator provides training for all new staff. Ongoing training for existing staff ensures the maintenance of high standards. Pupils now receive better support in writing independently. This has resulted in pupils making more rapid progress in improving their writing.

Pupils' progress is carefully monitored. School information shows that the majority of pupils are now making progress at, or above, the rate expected of them by the school. Achievement in writing is now in line with achievement in reading and mathematics. Inspectors saw clear evidence of progress in writing. For example, pupils whose handwriting had been hard to decipher progressed to writing clearly. Some pupils had relied on support to complete written tasks. Inspectors saw work showing that they had progressed to writing complex sentences independently.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. The care and attention given to all pupils reflects this. Staff place the highest priority on pupils' safety and well-being.

Leaders ensure that all staff are thoroughly trained to support the pupils in their care. Appropriate and timely training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. They are vigilant about potential risks.

Statutory checks are carried out on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The safeguarding governor has attended appropriate training. He visits the school and meets regularly with the designated safeguarding officer. This provides oversight and scrutiny of relevant processes.

All staff have a strong working knowledge of safeguarding issues and understand the risks to pupils. They engage closely with parents and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

The systems to safeguard pupils are robust and rigorously monitored by leaders. Safeguarding concerns raised by staff result in swift actions by leaders.

Pupils say that they feel safe and know that they can share any concerns with an adult.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out how the significant changes in leadership had affected the school. The governors and trust staff described the careful planning that preceded the changes. You were initially appointed on an interim basis while the previous headteacher remained in post. This allowed time for a gradual handover and helped with continuity of leadership. When you became permanent head of school you knew the school well. Staff and parents confirmed that the process of changing school leadership did not affect the pupils.
- The motivation for a change in trust membership was to be part of a trust with a greater focus on special schools. School leaders felt that staff and pupils would benefit from joining a trust with other special school members. Staff now have access to a wider range of support and resources. Teachers are able to liaise with staff from other schools within the trust. For example, they can ensure the accuracy of assessment. Pupils can take part in events and activities across the trust, which develops their confidence. During the inspection one class was taking part in a drama production at another trust school. There are also opportunities for sharing the strengths of the school across the trust. This enables staff to gain experience in other schools and develop their skills further. Parents confirmed that the change in trust membership had been smooth from their point of view.
- The school website contained very limited information about the curriculum. I wanted to find out how well the curriculum prepares pupils for the next stage in their education. There is a carefully planned curriculum with a strong focus on reading, writing and mathematics. This ensures that pupils develop these key skills. This prepares them well for moving on from the school.
- Teachers incorporate aspects of reading, writing and mathematics into lessons very effectively. For example, in a science lesson an inspector saw an example of story writing being woven into the lesson. Work in pupils' books showed evidence of this approach across all classes. Staff training has supported the development of the curriculum. The result is a flexible curriculum which meets the needs of pupils.
- I was also interested to find out how effectively governors held leaders to account. The school website contained very limited information about governance. The trust board and a local governing body (LGB) provide governance for the school. Governors are knowledgeable and understand the school's performance. There is a range of expertise and experience in the LGB. This is well used by allocating responsibilities to match members' skills and knowledge.
- Governors provide challenge and hold leaders to account effectively. Governors attend meetings with middle leaders. These meetings hold middle leaders to account for the performance of their area of responsibility. The trust has provided good support, for example in providing training for new governors. For most delegated aspects of governance, the LGB members conduct their duties effectively. However,

the school website, for which LGB members are responsible, does not meet statutory requirements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The school website is updated so that it meets statutory requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other leaders. An inspector met with two members of the local governing body and with a representative from the New Bridge multi-academy trust. An inspector had telephone conversations with the chief executive officer of the New Bridge multi-academy trust and a representative from the local authority.

Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at social times. An inspector met with a group of parents.

Leaders accompanied inspectors on visits to classrooms, where they observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects. They looked at pupils' work across the school.

Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They scrutinised a range of policies and leaders' school improvement plan and self-evaluation. Inspectors checked on the school's website.

Inspectors considered the responses of 21 parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, along with free-text comments. They took account of 47 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.