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Mr Christopher Ormiston
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ormiston

Short inspection of Windlehurst School

Following my visit to the school on 14 May 2019 with Doreen Davenport, 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 July 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

As the new headteacher, you have a strong vision for the future of the school which is shared by leaders and staff. You have worked with leaders to ensure that the caring and supportive ethos in the school continues to be a strength. Positive relationships between pupils and staff are nurtured and valued. Staff greet pupils with a warm welcome in the morning. Form time at the beginning of the day helps pupils to settle into their learning with a positive attitude. Pupils say that they feel safe, secure and well cared for in school.

Pupils in key stage 3 are now taught the core subjects of English, mathematics and science by subject specialist teachers at the Hawk Green site. Pupils in key stage 4 are based at the practical learning site in Stockport. Both sites ensure that pupils learn the core subjects. However, there are noticeable inconsistencies in expectations, challenge and progress between key stage 3 and key stage 4. Some pupils who join the school in Year 10 or 11 may have been out of education for some time. Staff use practical short courses leading to Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) unit awards to re-engage pupils with education. This model is appropriate for some pupils; however, it disadvantages some pupils moving up from key stage 3, where expectations are high, or pupils arriving in key

stage 4 who are most able. Consequently, some pupils' outcomes at key stage 4 are not as strong as they could be.

Leaders are continuing to work with the local authority to ensure that any admissions to the school are appropriate and that the school is able to meet the pupils' identified needs.

Since the last inspection, leaders have taken action to improve attendance. Staff work with parents and carers to identify and overcome barriers. While some pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs affect their good attendance, most pupils show improved attendance over time. This is because a number of reward incentives, including certificates and trips, are working to motivate pupils to attend regularly. The practical curriculum is appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed by pupils. They talk enthusiastically about their Duke of Edinburgh Award, work experience and science experiments. Through leaders' successful strategies, attendance has improved over the last three years. Some pupils show significant improvements in attendance when compared to their previous school.

Some actions for improvement identified at the previous inspection have not happened quickly enough. This is because governors have not challenged leaders to bring about the required improvements. Leaders were asked to strengthen leadership and management further by ensuring that systems are not over-reliant on any one member of staff. This is so that, should any leader leave, the quality of overall leadership and management can be maintained. Measures to bring about this improvement are still in their infancy. Leadership roles and responsibilities have been implemented across the school this academic year. There are signs of improvement; however, it is too early for leaders to be able to demonstrate and evaluate any impact on school improvement.

Although governors and leaders have known for some time the need to improve the school website, they have been slow to act. The statutory policies on the website are, in some cases, many years out of date. Although there are updated policies in school, governors have not challenged leaders to ensure that they are readily accessible for parents and carers through the website.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils know who they can talk to and have a genuine respect for the staff team. The high staff-to-pupil ratio works to keep pupils safe and staff are highly vigilant to notice any changes in behaviour that may indicate a cause for concern. Safeguarding procedures are well embedded. Staff know what to look out for and how to report concerns. The designated safeguarding lead is quick to action any referrals. The family support worker works closely with pupils, parents and families as well as other agencies to ensure that pupils are supported effectively.

Staff training is up to date including safeguarding, first aid and social, emotional and mental health awareness.

Although there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, in a minority of cases record-keeping is not as detailed and clear as it could be.

Inspection findings

- One of my key lines of enquiry was whether pupils leaving key stage 4 are well prepared for their next steps in learning. Careers information, advice and guidance are used successfully to help pupils plan their next steps and future careers. Work experience is matched to pupils' interests and aspirations and consequently pupils can make informed choices about their future. For example, placements have been secured in a horse stables and with a home maintenance company. This personalised approach works well as all school leavers in 2018 moved successfully on to college, training or employment.
- Another line of enquiry looked at the actions leaders have taken to reduce the high rates of fixed-term exclusions. Although the school's data shows that exclusions have reduced by almost half this academic year, the figure is still high when compared to similar schools nationally. Leaders now plan personalised targeted support and intervention, which is beginning to have a positive impact on behaviour. Leaders' detailed analysis on exclusions provides a strategic overview to inform school planning, development and future interventions.
- Leaders have invested in professional development which is enabling staff at all levels to improve and expand their expertise. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator, (SENCo) is currently undertaking the SENCo qualification. The knowledge and strategies learned on the course are also being shared widely across the staff team. Two support staff have undertaken sensory intervention training. They are now able to work with pupils to support their sensory and physical needs, for example through model making and Lego building to develop pupils' fine motor skills. This in turn improves handwriting and practical skills. Pupils' sensory needs are being met and supported through personalised physical activities. As a result of the personalised interventions, pupils' anxiety is reduced so that they can settle and concentrate on their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school website and all statutory policies are up to date and comply with current guidance on what maintained schools must publish online
- pupils in key stage 4 have an appropriate curriculum where they are challenged and able to achieve their potential, particularly in English, mathematics and science
- governors provide appropriate challenge to leaders so that the school's next steps are actioned and implemented
- they embed the new leadership roles to fully establish a widened senior

leadership team

- recording systems for safeguarding are accurate and detailed
- fixed-term exclusions are reduced even further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockport. 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, senior leaders and the chair of the governing body. Inspectors also met with one member of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from Stockport local authority. Inspectors met with the safeguarding lead and scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the single central record. Joint learning walks were undertaken with leaders and pupils' books were scrutinised. There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. Inspectors took account of the 28 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff, spoke to staff during the day and also met with a small group of staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils and also met with a small group of pupils. They observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Documents were scrutinised, including information about pupils' achievements; education, health and care plans (EHCP); the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; records of pupils' attendance and exclusions and information relating to the work of your governing body.