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Mr Neil Oxley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Oxley

### **Short inspection of Oaklands School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 July 2019 with Gary Kelly, 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. Since taking up post in January 2018, you have established strong and trusting relationships with the whole school community. You and your leadership team have a robust action plan for continued improvement. The governing body has been further strengthened by new members with a wide range of experience. Some skilled and experienced governors ably support the new members. All parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, along with parents spoken to during the inspection, were extremely happy with the school. They could not praise the school enough and talked about the difference it had made to their children's academic and personal progress. They would all recommend the school to other parents, and typical comments included: 'School has changed our lives for the better.'

The school certainly lives up to its motto: 'the best for all, the best from all'. Every pupil is treated as a unique individual, yet every school member is part of a supportive, warm and friendly community. Pupils value their friendships and look after one another. This ethos and collaborative working were visible during the inspection. For example, the vast majority of pupils were working together on the school's summer production of 'Shrek the Musical'. Parents talked about the confidence their children acquire and the skills they learn through the annual production. One parent summed up the voice of many: 'Staff are particularly good at teaching pupils how to interact with each other appropriately. They work hard at the hidden curriculum, teaching manners and respect for each other.'

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Policies and procedures are robust, including the required checks on members of staff. The designated safeguarding lead works closely with the headteacher. They check that all necessary actions have been taken, including referrals to the local authority and other external agencies. The safeguarding governor meets regularly with the safeguarding team. Updated safeguarding reports are scrutinised by the governing body at every governing body meeting.

Staff training is comprehensive throughout the academic year. Training is delivered through registered external agencies, such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, as well as through the local authority. Consequently, staff are vigilant and quick to spot changes in a pupil's behaviour or emotions that may indicate a cause for concern.

Pupils said they always had a staff member they could talk to. They said their concerns were always listened to, and staff were quick to help. Parents were also very satisfied with the way any concerns are listened to and acted on. They also talked about the warm and welcoming environment in the school.

## **Inspection findings**

- One of the lines of enquiry I explored with you was whether teachers continue to have high expectations of what pupils can learn and achieve. This was undoubtedly confirmed during the inspection. The excellent relationships between the staff and pupils establish firm foundations. Pupils are happy, confident learners. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The curriculum is exciting and allows pupils to learn the core subjects of English, mathematics and science alongside creative options such as music, art and media. Teachers plan lessons to spark imagination and enthusiasm, so that pupils are excited and engaged in their learning. For example, some pupils who were not involved in the drama production were absorbed in a science topic and learning about climate change. Other pupils were making their own short animation films. Work scrutiny showed that, across most subjects, opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills were evident. However, in a small number of subjects, this was not the case and opportunities to practise extended writing had been missed.
- Another line of enquiry looked at the outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4 and the sixth form. Outcomes have been consistently strong for the last five years. Year 11 pupils who left the school in 2018 all achieved a number of nationally recognised qualifications. This included GCSEs, functional skills, entry-level qualifications and vocational qualifications. Students who left the school at the end of year 12 in 2018 also achieved a range of nationally recognised qualifications. As well as continuing to study English and mathematics, students achieved qualifications in personal and social development, home cooking, land-based studies, computing, citizenship and enterprise. All pupils and students who leave Oaklands school at the end of their education move successfully into a

college or training provision. Leaders and teachers regularly check the progress of pupils. Personalised support is effective in helping pupils to overcome barriers to learning. Consequently, all pupils are making outstanding progress and gaining nationally recognised qualifications.

- I also explored with you how the school supports pupils' well-being and personal development, including how to stay safe. This area of learning is as valued as the academic learning. Leaders have recently reviewed the curriculum to introduce a sexual health and relationships curriculum from September 2019. This will strengthen the current curriculum and allow more time for pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding of personal health, relationships and staying safe. A wide range of activities and experiences have been used this academic year to help pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe. This has included visiting theatre productions and workshops and inviting visiting speakers, as well as formal lessons and discussion. Pupils and parents spoke appreciatively about the school's emotional literacy support known as ELSA. Pupils receive support in a number of areas, including friendships, social skills, managing emotions and bereavement. Model-making therapy is used at lunchtime to allow pupils to have a safe space to talk about their feelings. The holistic and comprehensive work that the school does to support pupils' well-being has recently been recognised, as the school has been awarded the national 'Well-Being Award for Schools'.
- I also looked at pupils' behaviour. Pupils' behaviour around the school is impeccable. The school is a calm and orderly environment. Pupils are respectful, welcoming and able to chat to visitors with confidence. They enjoy their break and lunchtimes. They enjoy being with their friends, and there are plenty of enjoyable, active and quiet activities for them to engage in. Incidents of bullying are very rare. The school's behaviour policy is applied consistently across the school. It sets clear expectations for pupils and staff, and consequently pupils know and understand the procedures and routines.
- My final line of enquiry looked at pupils' attendance. Attendance is higher than the average for similar schools nationally. This has been a consistent picture for the previous five years. Leaders use a range of positive strategies that work to encourage excellent attendance. This includes attendance draws, trips, visits and activities. Parents said that their children love being in the school, and the positive rewards are really encouraging them to attend well.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the opportunities for pupils to develop extended writing skills in subjects other than English.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. 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 and your senior leaders. They held a meeting with members of the governing body, including the chair. Inspectors met with the safeguarding leads and scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the record of checks completed on staff. Joint learning walks with leaders were completed, and pupils' books were scrutinised. There were 22 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire for parents. Inspectors also met with parents formally and spoke to one parent on the telephone. There were 28 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff, and inspectors spoke with staff formally and informally throughout the day. They observed behaviour in lessons, at break and lunchtime and around the school. Documents were scrutinised, including information about pupils' progress; the school's self-evaluation; the school-improvement plan; records of pupils' attendance and behaviour; and information relating to the work of the governing body.