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Mrs Linda Lester
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Dear Mrs Lester

Short inspection of Oakdale School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2017 with Kathleen McArthur, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher you have driven improvements across the school and ensured that the school continues to improve. Consequently, pupils make good and some outstanding progress across the school. The recent strengthening of governance and the expansion of your middle leadership have enabled distinct lines of responsibility to be implemented. There is now a clear trajectory so that teaching, learning and assessment can blossom across the school.

You and your deputy effectively drive improvements across the school.

Consequently, the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been tackled swiftly.

Your vision, 'to be the best we can be', is echoed across the school. Staff work hard so that 'every moment is a learning opportunity' and this sums up the *raison d'être* of the school. All staff play a lead role in nurturing pupils' confidence, independence and communication skills. Staff are tuned in to pupils' unique potential and treat each pupil as an individual. Inclusivity is a golden thread that runs through the school: pupils' background, culture, ethnicity or social group are not seen as barriers or obstacles to success.

You have ensured that pupils and families experience a happy, supportive and welcoming school with expert staff that nurture pupils' development. Pupils benefit from the good facilities on offer within your school. As a result, pupils' academic, personal and physical development is very well supported. There is an atmosphere of

calm in the school. Your members of staff are well trained to deal with any challenging behaviour efficiently and without fuss. Teachers plan lessons effectively so that each individual pupil's needs are met. Pupils who are able to vocalise are encouraged to laugh and smile, which creates a happy and vibrant atmosphere in and out of lessons. Challenging behaviour, such as agitated or anxious outbursts, are rare and managed well. Staff are well trained and deal with this professionally and sensitively and it is rarely allowed to disrupt learning. A positive atmosphere permeates your whole school because staff care about pupils' well-being, respect their dignity and genuinely enjoy working with them.

While a number of pupils make strong progress within your school, there remains some inconsistent teaching and learning across classrooms. Current systems to support and improve the quality of teaching and learning are being relaunched and have not yet eliminated the difference across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You recognise the importance of safeguarding and have ensured that all staff receive a wide range of training on potential areas of risk for young people. There is a strong safeguarding culture within the school. Policies and procedures used in the school are robust and implemented to the letter. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare and they are clear about their legal duties. Members of staff at all levels understand how to raise concerns and are well versed in their responsibility for pupils' welfare and safety. Staff are vigilant and recognise that pupils are extremely vulnerable; they work hard to understand pupils' varying communication barriers in disclosing worries, difficulties or abuse. The welfare and well-being of every pupil is risk-assessed and staff are knowledgeable about healthcare plans and the application of pupils' medication needs. You have ensured that the school is well supported with medical staff and therapists that assist in meeting the needs of pupils. A high number of pupils travel to and from school by organised transportation and you have ensured that this is well organised and that pupils are safeguarded from risks.

Inspection findings

- Staff skilfully use a variety of communication strategies, depending on the skills and preferences of individual pupils. They reduce the amount of verbal information they use to make their instructions clear. They supplement speech with visual supports and signing to promote pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils make strong progress in the development of their communication skills.
- There are considerable strengths in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Leaders have ensured that staff receive appropriate training linked to their needs. Consequently, pupils are making strong progress within some classrooms. There are pockets of excellence across the school. Consequently, the school has recently been awarded autism accreditation. However, some inconsistencies remain among classes and some teaching assistants miss opportunities to effectively capture pupils' learning. Middle leaders have yet to embed and evaluate systems that share the good and outstanding

practice that already exists across the school.

- Governors demonstrate a shared understanding of their roles and responsibility in the school. They have established well-organised committees as appropriate platforms for leaders to provide information about the progress of pupils. However, the minutes of meetings reveal that they do not ask astute questions, and challenge leaders rigorously.
- Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and work together to anticipate their needs so that barriers to learning are removed. Praise is used frequently across the school to boost confidence and self-esteem. For example, the school 'wow' board recognises pupils' efforts and celebrates pupils' successes.
- Leaders are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development and they are taking effective action to improve the school. However, some actions have only been deployed recently and are not fully embedded. For example, leaders are still developing and refining the recording and assessment of pupils' progress. Consequently, these improvements have yet to have an impact on improving the school.
- Leaders go the extra mile to ensure that pupils at the end of key stage 2 make successful transitions to their feeder high school. A dedicated leader ensures that a wide range of rich, well-organised programmes are in place. As a result, pupils and families are well informed and have any uncertainties dispelled before their arrival in Year 7. Teachers and therapists ensure that new providers have a secure understanding of the needs of pupils and the needs of their families. For example, pupils make regular visits to their new school and photographic information booklets and coffee mornings are used to familiarise pupils and reduce the anxiety about change. Care plans, health and child protection information is clearly communicated and cascaded to pupils' new schools. This ensures that pupils have no dips in their progress and development.
- A specialist teacher of education ensures that effective outreach to local mainstream primary schools provides unique opportunities for pupils to further develop their communication skills. Mainstream pupils visit Oakdale School daily to participate in joint learning activities. Pupils work side by side and Oakdale pupils rise to the challenges provided by their mainstream peers, showing determination and deepening their skill development even further.
- Current attendance is shrewdly monitored and analysed weekly across the school. Any issues or trends that arise are quickly and efficiently addressed. The attendance officer has ensured rigorous processes are in place to drive up attendance across the school. No child falls through the net and daily contact home via phone calls reflects the school's high expectations. Consequently, attendance at the school is strong. The school takes all appropriate steps to challenge parents on poor attendance.
- Parents and carers were overwhelmingly supportive of the work the school does and its impact on pupils' progress and well-being. They consider the school to be well led and that their children are well looked after. There were several positive comments on the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, about the work of the school. For example: 'My child is well cared for and any concerns or questions

I have are quickly and professionally dealt with.'

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they evaluate and refine assessment and recording systems as part of the recommendations of the Rochford Review
- teaching assistants are provided with further support so they can successfully capture and record pupils' learning
- middle leaders embed opportunities for all staff to share good practice across the school and measure its impact on pupils' progress and staff development.

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

Yours sincerely

Dawn Platt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you, your deputy and members of the governing body. A small meeting also took place with your leader for inclusion and transition. Inspectors also met with a small number of pupils.

Short visits were made to a number of lessons, most of which were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe teaching and look at pupils' learning development.

Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons, in the outside play areas and at breaktime and lunchtime.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, records related to attendance, and information relating to pupils' achievement.

Inspectors took into account 11 responses from parents on Ofsted's free-text service as well as 16 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire. They also considered 83 responses to the online staff questionnaire.

This inspection particularly focused on a number of key questions:

- Are pupils continuing to make good progress across the school in their learning and development?
- Have leaders successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection? Do teachers clearly identify intended learning for individual pupils in all lessons? Are they linked to pupils' own targets?
- Are all staff provided with high-quality development and support to ensure continued high-quality teaching and learning for pupils?
- Are all staff knowledgeable and do they liaise appropriately together, and with others, to ensure that pupils are highly and effectively safeguarded within and beyond school?
- Are governors challenging and highly skilled in holding leaders to account and questioning the accuracy of information and data provided to them?
- Are pupils well supported in their transition between year groups and also between schools to ensure continued achievement?
- Do leaders engage appropriate systems to ensure pupils' attendance is the best it can be?