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Mrs Leigh Edser
Dysart School
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Dear Mrs Edser

Short inspection of Dysart School

Following my visit with Kanjalwit Singh, Ofsted Inspector, to the school on 23 September 2015, 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The new leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There is no room for complacency; you and your team have worked with determination to sustain and improve the quality of the school's provision. You have carefully managed the small changes in leadership, the school's expansion and building works. You have ensured that these changes have had no detriment to pupils' safety, well-being or learning. Leaders and governors know the school exceptionally well, and are skilled at identifying where to provide support and what improvements to make.

The school is a calm and happy place. Daily routines are well established, providing security and stability for pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy school, are keen to learn and attend well. Staff show exceptional respect for the children and a determination for them to make progress. You and your team have set high expectations for pupils' safety, learning and progress. Staff follow your lead through interesting and age-appropriate activities that engage pupils well. The careful assessment of each pupil ensures that all pupils' care needs are met and that behaviour support and therapies are used well. Pupils' difficulties are anticipated and handled well due to careful planning by staff. Consequently, there is minimal disruption to learning or distress for pupils.

Staff speak of the inclusive culture of the school and the excellent teamwork between teachers, therapists, care staff and teaching assistants. They feel well supported in their work due to regular professional development and the culture

leaders have established that encourages staff to seek help or ask questions. This open approach particularly helps new staff and those who change classes. New initiatives, such as the new assessment system and the curriculum in the upper school, are carefully introduced so that staff feel confident in using them and understand the benefits. The use of a broader range of small-step learning targets is helping teachers plan and meet the needs of individual pupils with much greater precision, so securing the best possible progress for all pupils.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked the school to develop pupils' independence in learning. Furthermore, the school was asked to provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to review their learning and help them improve. The leadership team has tackled these with the following results.

- Staff are mindful of not taking over pupils' activities or work. Staff provide appropriate support, guidance and encouragement, which is helping pupils to gain confidence in doing things for themselves.
- Pupils' progress has risen year on year since the last inspection, with higher proportions of pupils making better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- The revised curriculum, particularly for older pupils, is more clearly based on contextual and real-life learning; this is helping these pupils to reflect on their work and make choices to help them improve. It is also giving pupils the opportunity to achieve accreditation and be better prepared for adult life and the next steps in their education.
- Work experience for some older pupils is helping them gain independence and develop their interests and skills.

Leaders are clear about their next steps for improvement. These include extending the new curriculum to the lower school and broadening the new assessment system to cover a wider range of subjects, including science and personal, social and health education.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have set the bar high in ensuring the safety and well-being of pupils. They have established a culture that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders understand the needs and vulnerabilities of their pupils exceptionally well. They use this to provide both a tenacious and systematic approach to pupils' safeguarding. Excellent links with social services and other agencies support pupils' safety and well-being extremely well. Staff are well trained and fully aware of their duties and the school's procedures. They speak of an open culture for safeguarding and the importance of sharing any concerns they may have.

The school's systems are reviewed annually or as needed, with termly checks undertaken by the safeguarding governor and rigorous reporting to other governors to ensure the effectiveness of the procedures. Leaders recognise the developmental needs and ages of pupils. They teach pupils appropriately about how to stay safe,

such as the use of social networking and travel training for sixth form pupils. The school's leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- You and the deputy headteacher are both new in post since the previous inspection and have formed a formidable team. You and the other leaders have an accurate and in-depth knowledge of the school, which you use to build on the school's strengths and to act on the aspects identified for improvement. You and your leaders are keen to innovate and not afraid to make changes, adeptly taking the staff with you. The sustaining of the high-quality provision is demonstrable testament to the staff's success and commitment. It is also evident in the external recognition by other schools and organisations of the school's work in providing support or working collaboratively with them to develop new approaches, such as the new assessment system.
- Governors effectively support the school to improve and share leaders' commitment to ensuring children's safety, inclusion and best possible achievement. Governors have checked on their expertise for supporting all areas of the school's work, including safeguarding. They have identified health as an area where there is less expertise and are actively recruiting to plug this gap. Governors have undertaken training to ensure that they are well placed to be familiar with the school's work, understand performance information and provide good challenge. They seek out information for themselves through regular visits to the school. Leaders are now providing governors with better performance information, which they are using well to challenge leaders. However, governors have yet to consider whether the school's monitoring and evaluation activities, such as those for checking the quality of teaching, provide them with all the information they require for holding the school to account.
- You and other leaders have a planned programme for checking the quality of teaching. At times, there is too much focus on what teachers are doing and not enough on the impact on pupils' learning. Nonetheless, leaders use the information gained well to inform professional development at individual and whole-school level. This is supporting teachers and those who work in classrooms well, and leading to improvement in pupils' progress in English and mathematics over time. However, in some instances where small weaknesses in teaching have been identified, this is not followed through with precision in subsequent monitoring activities to check for improvement.
- School progress information shows year-on-year improvement since the previous inspection. A high percentage of pupils make better than expected progress from their starting points and almost all others make expected progress. The new assessment systems are enabling teachers to plan with far greater precision and target learning to individual pupils' needs. The continued use of age-appropriate and interesting themes and topics, the variety of activities and the high expectations set by teachers contribute significantly to pupils' outstanding progress over time. However, in the classrooms of some less experienced

teachers, the teaching assistants supporting pupils do not get as actively involved as they could in supporting pupils' learning. Progress in speaking skills, while still strong, is lower than in other areas. The focus on developing pupils' communication skills, including speaking, for those who are able, both in and out of lessons, is not high enough.

- The new curriculum is based firmly on pupils' needs and providing better-tailored and age-appropriate experiences. The school has rightly taken a phased approach, starting in the upper school. The two strands are a sensory approach for those with profound and multiple difficulties, and a more academic approach for others, including those pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. At Key Stage 3, the approach is based on learning content, moving to accredited programmes in Key Stage 4 and, in the sixth form, life skills and preparation for adult life. In the sixth form, this more age-appropriate curriculum is providing more time for community-based learning, college placements, safety training and work experiences, all of which are building pupils' self-confidence, accelerating achievement and broadening their learning experiences. This reflects the school's unfailing ambition for pupils through carefully planned and well-thought-out improvements, as well as capitalising on the current expansion of pupil numbers. Pupils across the school are given many and varied opportunities for social and cultural development, such as through horse-riding lessons and visits out. Leaders also make use of current affairs, such as the general election, when pupils elected their own school council, and the Rugby World Cup, when they looked at other countries and sport.
- At the previous inspection, the pastoral care of pupils was viewed as excellent, enabling them to access the curriculum successfully. The school continues to believe this is the case, based on a wide range of evidence; inspectors agree. Pupils' well-being and safety are at the heart of all that the school does. Almost all the parents who contributed to the inspection are positive about the work of the school and the care their children receive. The curriculum is planned around pupils' needs, with floor and play breaks used well to help pupils focus at times of direct learning. Staff are highly knowledgeable about the pupils in their care; they are trained in moving and handling for those who are wheelchair bound and in managing behaviour for those who need such help. This awareness of pupils' needs throughout the day enables pupils to be ready and able to learn. Governors and leaders recognised that the school's approach to behaviour support could be improved. You and other leaders revised the school's policy and procedures and are providing staff with training in the new approach, which is a further example of your active approach to improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- they precisely follow up on all the findings from activities to check on the quality of provision
- further improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that throughout lessons all adults are actively involved in supporting pupils' learning and that pupils have every opportunity to develop their communication skills across the school day.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met you, your deputy headteacher, the heads of the upper and lower schools, and four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. With you and your deputy headteacher, we visited all classrooms to observe teaching and pupils' learning. We met with a small group of older pupils and spoke to others in lessons and at breaktimes. Inspectors evaluated recent information on pupils' progress and looked at how well the new assessment system is being used to support pupils' learning. We reviewed records about pupils' attendance and keeping children safe. We considered the views of parents from Parent View. We also spoke with parents at the start of the day and met a group of staff, which included teachers, teaching assistants and therapists, at the end of the day.