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Mrs S Hewitt
Principal
Beacon Hill Academy
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Dear Mrs Hewitt

Short inspection of Beacon Hill Academy

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 2016 with Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained and further improved the outstanding quality of education for all pupils since the last inspection. Committed and determined school leaders, governors and staff ensure that outcomes continue to rise and that all pupils have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

At Beacon Hill Academy the vision for excellence underpins the provision for all pupils and this ethos permeates every aspect of the school's work. You and the senior team have worked relentlessly to produce a culture which values all members of this inspiring community. The needs of pupils are taken into account from the very start of their time at the school. Pupils receive all the support they need to reach their goals; no time is wasted. They rightly say 'this school is great'.

The manner in which progress is measured ensures that all the different elements of pupils' achievements are valued by staff and parents alike. Detailed recording systems are in place in every classroom. These ensure that every small step of pupils' achievements is captured and well recorded. As a result, their progress is well understood and the standards they achieve are high. All staff take responsibility for recording the progress pupils make.

Staff place pupils at the heart of all they do. The patient support of highly skilled, well-trained staff means that the choices pupils make about their learning are taken into account when activities are planned and developed. As a result, pupils become confident and successful pupils. Staff work hard to effectively plan a highly creative and personalised curriculum which engages pupils and supports them to develop the ability to be independent in their work. This in turn creates future opportunities for them because they can access work experience and the roles adults play in the wider community.

The recent developments in the leadership team mean that leadership is well distributed to confident staff. Senior leaders relish the challenge they face each day as they ensure that all pupils have equality of access to a curriculum which inspires and motivates them to do their very best. As a result, the progress of pupils is outstanding. Governors are well informed of the frequent and rigorous checks leaders make on the work of the staff, and all leaders have an accurate view of the quality of the school's work. Strengths are celebrated and improvement is continual. Nothing is left to chance. Staff value each other's views, and teachers and support staff know their pupils well.

Staff continuously challenge pupils through the aspirational targets they set for the outcomes for all, and work tirelessly to engage them in meaningful learning activities. While the building was not built for the purpose it is now used for, staff have determinedly made it as fit for its current purpose as possible. They are creative and use imaginative resources to enhance learning very effectively. Staff are brimming with good ideas about how to make learning even better for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding pupils is strong. All aspects of safeguarding meet requirements. Pupils are happy, relaxed and confident when they are at the school. They develop a love for learning which powerfully influences their progress. Behaviour for learning is excellent, due to each and every child feeling valued by the very caring staff. Pupils are well supported to be engaged in their own self-management where appropriate and staff ensure that all risks taken are appropriately managed. Risk assessments are frequent and rigorous. As a result, pupils are safe. Staff know and understand the policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and know how to report any concerns they have. Staff and governors receive regular training updates and know that safeguarding is a priority for the school.

There are clear, up-to-date policies and procedures for all aspects of the school's provision that require them, for example the intimate care of pupils. These aspects of support are seamlessly included in the everyday work of the school. They do not interrupt learning but are given the priority required to ensure comfort and safety of pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe. Staff keep them safe in school and ensure that they are taught to keep themselves safe too. Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities through which they can engage with the wider community. Young people told me of their recent visit to Lakeside, where staff guidance on how to keep themselves safe was put into practice. Young people were given mobile phones and went shopping in small groups, calling staff regularly to establish their safety and whereabouts.

Inspection findings

- All leaders and managers are highly ambitious for pupils to excel, and demonstrate a strong sense of purpose which encourages all staff to strive for continued improvement. Leaders ensure staff can develop and use their skills in the best way possible to meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make the most of their abilities and reach their potential. Governors are very effective. They carry out their statutory duties with rigour and make regular visits to the school. They are knowledgeable about the needs of the pupils and about how these are met effectively by staff in school.
- The personalised learning routes planned for post-16 learners are outstanding. They allow students to gain the necessary skills and aptitudes to be as independent as possible when they move on to the next stage of their education, employment or training. Staff truly develop learners' ability to work independently.
- Children in early years gain from a curriculum which is cohesive and inclusive. It ensures that they make choices at the earliest opportunity and that their responses are recognised and valued. This gives children the confidence in taking the next step in learning and in making decisions for themselves.
- Records of progress for early years children are detailed and include all aspects of the child's development. The 'tree of progress' which is used to record achievement demonstrates beautifully the growth made by children in their learning and personal developments. All steps of progress, however small, are equally valued.
- Parents are unanimously positive about the work of the school and are full of praise for the staff. Pupils say that Beacon Hill is the best school ever and they are happy to be there. Learning is fun and gives them a chance to develop their self-esteem and confidence. However, parents' feedback suggests that the lack of information on the school's website does not enable them to understand the significant quality of the school's work. Analysis shows that the range of options given is not evident, which limits parents from making informed choices.

- Teachers' detailed and individualised planning for learning activities ensures that the complex needs of individual pupils are taken fully into account. Work shows that pupils are offered activities tailored to meet their needs and recorded in a way which is most valuable and accessible to them. Leaders know where the best work happens and use this knowledge to lead and develop the quality of practice across the school.
- The rate of attendance is good when the nature of the needs of pupils is taken into account. A high number of pupils have significant medical issues which need regular hospitalisation or medical treatment. The school takes excellent care of their pupils, including holding hospital passports for those who may need the emergency services. Attendance rates are good. Levels of absence are above the national rates but a number of pupils spend a significant amount of time receiving medical treatments. There is good evidence to demonstrate that pupils attend school as much as they can.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding. Pupils trust the adults to respect their choices and help them to make progress. As a result, pupils have a love of learning which is apparent in all classrooms. Pupils engage with their learning at appropriate levels and enjoy interacting with staff and peers alike. The consistent use of supported communication, for example using signing or objects of reference in all areas of the school, means that pupils always have the best opportunity to make their own decisions. Staff are happy to wait for a response and check that pupils' understanding is right before they move on.
- The school hosts and manages events for newly qualified teachers; these events highlight aspects of the school's work but also serve to share guidance for their teaching practice which can be used in mainstream environments.
- Teachers check the accuracy of the assessments for youngsters both with their colleagues at Beacon Hill Academy and with staff from local mainstream schools. This work validates the assessments made by the school. It also ensures that mainstream peers have a depth of understanding of the use of the P scale assessment system (used to record the outcomes for youngsters with special educational needs or disability).
- The strong outreach programme supports very effectively the school's pupils attending mainstream education. It also offers additional help to mainstream pupils identified as having special educational needs or disability, ensuring that pupils' needs are well considered in mainstream environments. Staff ensure the range of agencies responsible for supporting pupils work well together to help pupils remain in their mainstream provisions. The outreach support also helps staff responsible for working with pupils to better meet their needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's website reflects the quality of work which happens in school so that parents can make an informed choice about their selection of school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Thurrock Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mary Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the principal, vice-principal and other representatives from the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with members of the teaching staff, a group of pupils and governors. An inspector spoke to representatives from the local authority by phone. Inspectors observed pupils in classrooms, at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school. Pupils' work was scrutinised. Leaders' analysis of pupil progress information was discussed, and safeguarding documentation and other records scrutinised. Inspectors also reviewed responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which collects parents' views about the school's work. They took into account the results from the parents' questionnaire and staff questionnaire recently carried out by the school.