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Mrs Anne Price
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Price

Short inspection of Inscape House School

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 2017 with Maggie Parker, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your senior leaders were appointed after the previous inspection and have provided gripping leadership and a crystalline vision. There is no doubt that Inscape House is, first and foremost, a school. You have made teaching and learning the core purpose of all that happens here.

This focus has resulted in a clever and effective synergy between the academic and therapeutic aspects of the school. The right balance has been struck between life skills, aspirations, self-worth and academic achievement. Autism is no barrier for pupils at this school. You and your staff have proven that pupils with autism can continue to develop skills and strategies that enable them to participate as independent, valued citizens enjoying equal rights and opportunities.

Since the last inspection, you have implemented new behaviour structures and systems to support pupils' behaviour which can be complex and challenging. The number of incidents, although high, has reduced and is continuing to do so.

Performance management arrangements have been introduced and this has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Staff value the support and challenge that they receive. They are particularly complimentary about the high-quality training and development opportunities that they receive. This has

equipped staff to meet the needs of the pupils better. Holding staff to account for pupils' progress has also contributed to them having greater pride and professionalism in their work. Nonetheless, recruitment and retention remain an issue. This lack of stability in staffing can be unsettling for the pupils and slows down the rates of progress that they make.

The last inspection also highlighted the need to introduce more specialist teaching and to maximise learning opportunities for pupils. The outcomes for pupils show notable improvements across all key stages and the breadth of curriculum subjects offered is balanced. The pupil premium funding is spent well. Pupils supported through this funding often achieve better than their peers. Current assessment information indicates that girls are not achieving as well as they should, which you are well aware of. You have identified the increased social, emotional and mental health issues that are impeding girls' learning. We spoke about the need to address this as you move forward.

You have established senior and middle leadership teams that are single-minded in providing pupils with the very best. You are all ambitious and highly aspirational for the pupils in your care. The school is held in high regard by parents, pupils and other external agencies. As one parent told me, 'My child needs a lot, but the school has given him more.' There is an energy and excitement about the future and it is the senior and middle leadership teams who are driving this. Governors have every confidence in you but, at times, do not always share the accurate understanding that you have of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You know what needs to be done, but the plans to ensure that this happens lack the necessary rigour.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders make every effort to ensure that pupils are kept safe. The checks carried out on adults before they work at the school are robust and the training that staff receive is extensive. Nothing is left to chance. Safeguarding is a thread that runs throughout the school. The pupils identify this school as their 'safe haven'. Leaders' work with external agencies is effective and communication with parents and carers is frequent and thorough.

Inspection findings

- The rates of absences and persistent absenteeism are higher than the national average for non-maintained special schools. Leaders were able to provide case studies for each pupil and the circumstances surrounding their absence. A significant factor is that the pupils come from 14 different local authorities, all with different term dates. Pupils are often kept at home so as to be able to spend time with their families.
- Pupil premium funding is well accounted for and the strategies used are specific to the individual needs of pupils. For example, a proportion of funding is allocated to provide family support to help them deal with pupils' complex needs when at home. The impact of the funding is monitored and evaluated regularly and is adapted when needs change.

- The curriculum is very well planned and is flexible so as to meet the needs of pupils. Great emphasis is placed on English, mathematics and science. A wide range of other subjects taught by specialists is also on offer. Computing and art are very popular and the pupils achieve very well in these subjects. Preparation for adult life is a key feature in post-16 provision and the opportunities for work experience are given high priority. This is further indication of the school's belief that the pupils at this school can, and do, achieve. We spent some time looking at the progress made by girls as outlined above.
- The therapeutic provision in the school is very effective. The interventions provided are very specific to enable the pupils to get the very best out of their schooling and to be happy and safe. As one pupil told inspectors, 'Being at this school is a pure privilege.' The therapeutic team work hand in hand with the classroom teachers and this reinforces leaders' vision that pupils are at school to learn.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- policy and practice are developed to meet the increasing and complex mental health issues of pupils, especially girls
- the strategies and incentives to strengthen the recruitment and retention of staff are reviewed
- the monitoring and evaluation processes of whole school priorities are sharpened, so as to secure improvements.

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

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your deputy headteachers, two members of the governing body and a group of staff. Inspectors conducted a learning walk and had the opportunity to see pupils' work. We met with a group of pupils during the day, spoke with a number of parents and took account of eight 'free text' comments. There were 62 responses to 'Parent View', the online questionnaire for parents. There were no responses to the online staff questionnaire and the pupil questionnaire. Inspectors scrutinised your assessment information, improvement planning, the single central record and other safeguarding procedures and practices.