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Mr Matthew Milburn
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Dear Mr Milburn

Short inspection of Saddleworth School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018 with Osama Abdul Rahim, Ofsted Inspector and Nell Banfield, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with governors and staff, you and your leadership team are ambitious and passionate about improving the quality of both academic and personal provision for all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. As several pupils commented, 'Teachers care about us and that is what is great about this school.'

You, together with governors and the senior leadership team, have an accurate and detailed understanding of the school and use this to identify strengths and priorities well. This has enabled you and your senior leadership team to target resources and raise the standard of teaching and learning across the school. You, usefully, obtain external validation of the quality of your work through a collaborative peer-review system involving leaders from other schools in the Dovestone Partnership, together with representatives of the local authority. Your focus on the individual is recognised and highly valued by pupils and parents. A parent remarked, 'Both my children have benefited from the excellent pastoral care provided at Saddleworth. The new Petals system is helping them to focus and aim high.'

Leaders and governors have ensured that the school has continued to focus on the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. Actions taken are now evaluated in terms of the impact they are having on pupils' progress. The school's approach to assessing pupils' work and providing feedback has been reviewed. This is helping pupils to develop a greater awareness of their current progress and how

to improve their work across the curriculum. Most pupils know their targets. Their work in their books demonstrates that they make good progress over time and progress in books is particularly strong in areas such as history, languages and English.

Teaching, learning and assessment are led and managed well. Senior leaders work hard to ensure that teachers are provided with a wide range of information about individual pupils and their learning needs. Many teachers make good use of this information to plan engaging learning activities which are suitably pitched towards meeting the needs of the different pupils in their classes. Some teachers are very effective in using questioning to encourage deeper thinking and ensure a swift pace of learning. Both of these were evident in English, history, languages and art lessons that were visited during the inspection. Leaders are aware that, in a minority of lessons and subjects, teachers offer less suitable levels of challenge and the pace of learning is slower. Effective systems are in place to support these teachers to improve their practice.

The large majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were very positive about the school. Many were particularly appreciative of the high-quality pastoral care; the smooth transition arrangements as children transferred from their respective primary schools; the extensive range of opportunities pupils are offered beyond the normal curriculum; and the positive way in which any incidents of bullying are managed. However, a small minority expressed concerns in relation to behaviour and some teaching. Leaders and governors are rightly prioritising actions to ensure that any incidences of poor behaviour are swiftly dealt with, and that all teaching matches that of the best in the school. Morale is high. Staff appreciate the professional development opportunities they are provided with, which are aimed at helping them to further develop their skills. They recognise that the school is improving. There is a sense of pride in Saddleworth School that is shared by staff, governors and pupils. Pupils confidently welcome visitors, are proud to share their work, and enjoy working with their teachers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that there is a strong safeguarding culture within the school; pupils, parents and staff all understand and support the culture. Staff receive regular training. They are acutely aware of the need to monitor pupils' behaviour, attitudes and physical appearance in order to identify any signals that may be a cause for concern, and of how they should act if they have any concerns. The system for referring concerns is used effectively.

Vulnerable pupils are closely monitored and timely referrals are made to external agencies when needed. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive the external support they may need; this is a strength that is recognised both by pupils and parents.

Pupils speak very confidently about how they are safe at school and are taught to keep themselves safe in other situations, including online. They learn about this in

English and philosophy lessons, and in assemblies. Pupils understand the dangers of radicalisation and other social dangers.

Inspection findings

- During this visit, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements, inspectors focused on specific aspects of the school's provision, including:
 - what actions leaders are taking, and whether they are being effective, to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, those who have low prior attainment and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
 - whether leaders are improving pupils' achievement in science
 - how effective leaders' strategies are for improving the attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- In 2016 and in 2017, by the end of Year 11, pupils had made average progress in English, mathematics, languages and a range of other subjects. Progress was strong in the humanities. At the same time, the progress made by pupils in science was weak.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils was weak in English, mathematics and science and the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those with low prior attainment was weak across a range of subjects. The school's current tracking information shows that outcomes are improving in science, and for these specific groups of pupils in a range of subjects across all year groups.
- Improvements have been made, particularly in whole-school planning and in provision for disadvantaged pupils. Currently, disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress across a range of subjects, particularly where teachers' planning ensures their individual learning needs are well catered for, and they are suitably challenged. They are making stronger progress in English, mathematics and science in years 7 and 10. In year 11, they are making stronger progress in English. Leaders acknowledge that there is more to be done, however, to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally.
- Strong leadership by the special educational needs coordinator – including good liaison with partner schools, parents and outside agencies – ensures very effective provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders are passionate about wanting the best for every pupil and relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Additional help for this group of pupils, within and outside their normal lessons, is proving effective in supporting their learning. As a result, pupils currently in the school who have SEN and/or disabilities are making strong progress. Many parents responding to Parent View were particularly appreciative of the extra support and the lesson-by-lesson feedback provided by the staff who support these pupils.

- Leaders set aspirational targets for pupils. These targets have encouraged teachers and pupils to have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders provide teachers with opportunities to moderate internal assessment information and leaders are confident in the quality of the information that is collected and used to monitor pupils' progress. Many teachers are using the information to good effect to set work that is suitably challenging for pupils in their classes. However, in some classes, teachers are not being effective in ensuring that pupils with low prior attainment are well enough supported and, as a result, they do not make the progress they should be making. During our visit, this was seen in mathematics and in science.
- Inspectors' visits to lessons and checks of pupils' work demonstrate that across the curriculum there are examples of pupils responding well to teachers' feedback to refine, edit and improve their work. Leaders have identified that there are still inconsistencies, and are working hard to iron these out.
- Leaders have been thwarted in their ongoing attempts to tackle pupils' underachievement in science, partly as a result of staff instability and poor staff attendance over the last few years. They have succeeded in addressing this, at the same time as having appointed a new, energetic and enthusiastic department leader. The science curriculum has been revised, schemes of work rewritten and lines of accountability are now much clearer. Action plans are accurately focused on key areas in need of improvement. Work is being undertaken to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and tracking information shows that pupils currently in the school are making stronger progress. Many pupils told inspectors that they enjoy their science lessons.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is in line with the national average, and is improving gradually. You recognise that some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, had poor attendance rates in the past. Leaders have raised the profile of good attendance. Pupils refer to notices on corridors and reflect positively on the rewards they receive for good attendance. The school's family support worker and team of attendance officers, ably supported by pastoral leaders, are focused on prioritising further improvements in this area. They have worked closely with families and outside agencies to support significant gains in attendance for individual pupils. However, there is more to be done to improve the attendance of these groups in order for them to be in line with their peers.
- The proportion of fixed-term exclusions for a very small minority of pupils has increased this year since higher expectations of pupils' behaviour have been set. Leaders' work to improve behaviour has been recognised by pupils. Pupils know the consequences of poor behaviour and the majority of teachers apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. There have been no permanent exclusions since the last inspection. Inspectors noted that the relatively small number of incidents of low-level, off-task behaviour in lessons is linked to pupils not being fully engaged in their learning. Leaders are tackling this through their continuous focus on ensuring high-quality teaching and learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve attendance further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities
- disadvantaged pupils continue to make rapid progress in their GCSE subjects, so that their progress matches other pupils in the school and nationally
- they share the good practice that exists in the school more widely, in order that teachers in all subjects use the information they have about individual pupils to plan and implement learning activities so that all pupils – especially pupils with low prior attainment – make consistently good progress and standards continue to rise.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Gaunt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited 22 lessons and looked at learning. A number of these visits were made jointly with leaders. During lesson visits, inspectors looked at pupils' work in their exercise books. We also spoke with pupils in lessons and during break- and lunchtimes, as well as meeting with pupils formally. Meetings were held with yourself, senior and middle leaders and four governors, including the chair of the governing body.

Documentary evidence was evaluated, including policies; strategic planning documents; the school self-evaluation document; analyses of pupils' achievements; minutes of governing body meetings; and records of the quality of teaching and learning. During the course of the inspection, I considered 147 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey, including free-text comments, along with 62 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and an external review of the work of the school.