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24 May 2018

Ms Debbie Sweet
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Sweet

Short inspection of Highbury School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Tudor Griffiths, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You lead your team with uncompromising vision and determination. Your high expectations of staff provide pupils with opportunities for aspirational success. You are ably supported by a deputy headteacher who is as passionate about ensuring that pupils progress and achieve to the best of their abilities. Your extremely high expectations and no compromise approach have led to a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. They are consistent in their approach to meet the high standards you set.

Class teachers and their teams know their pupils well. They plan carefully to make sure that each pupil's needs are fully met. This skilled teaching allows pupils with complex needs to meet targets quickly and progress at a rapid pace. Pupils clearly enjoy their time at school and reward staff with smiles and other forms of non-verbal communication.

Staff enjoy working at the school and are proud to do so. They are well supported by you and appreciate the facilities available to them to carry out their important work. They report that they 'feel lucky' to be part of this school. They have a great deal of respect for you and appreciate the importance you place on ensuring a healthy work–life balance.

You have led, designed and implemented a rich curriculum for your pupils. They benefit from the high-quality content that ensures that all areas of their development are considered. Decisions to place outstanding practitioners in key positions have led to rapid improvements and strong support for other members of staff.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is exemplary. Aspects of SMSC are embedded throughout each lesson and many other aspects of the school week, for example in the assemblies that provoke thought for all involved and are delivered by pupils. These assemblies are very well attended by parents and families of pupils.

The school environment is purposeful and calm and provides a caring and rewarding experience for pupils. The school provides pupils with many opportunities for enrichment, including horse riding, participation in theatre activities and the use of the on-site swimming pool.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has a very strong safeguarding culture in which all staff see it as their responsibility to keep children safe. Leaders ensure that all relevant checks that are required for those working with children are in place. Staff receive regular and effective training and are up to date with current legislation. They are clear and confident on procedures they must follow if they have any concerns.

Routines and protocols are firmly in place to ensure the safety of pupils, for example the calm and controlled methods of entry into school in the morning and out of school at the end of the day. These involve many vehicles and members of staff and are organised efficiently with high levels of communication.

The school works hard to support pupils and their families when they are in need or crisis. The school works exceptionally well with the local authority and other external agencies to ensure that individual needs are met quickly and effectively.

Inspection findings

- Every adult at school engages in a very positive way with all pupils. Staff are exceptionally skilled and dedicated to meeting the very complex and significant needs of pupils. Staff note that 'pupils are at the centre of everything we do'; this is very evident around all aspects of the school.
- There are very high expectations of how the school can encourage pupils to be

involved in a range of exciting and challenging opportunities, both in and out of school. Teachers support pupils well on off-site learning experiences. Pupils are encouraged to take part in an annual theatre performance in collaboration with the high school that many of the pupils will attend.

- The personal development of pupils is paramount. Every effort is made to ensure that individual pupils achieve success in a wide variety of ways. This continues through the transition process when pupils are preparing to move to their next school. This process is thorough and introduced early to ensure that pupils are assured and confident about their move.
- Pupils show respect for one another, members of staff and visitors alike. They are inquisitive about visitors but remain astute and are aware new visitors are unknown to them. They are assured by the presence of staff but will ask for identification at times, reinforcing the teaching of 'keeping safe' that they receive.
- Teachers use a wide variety of methods to enable them to successfully meet the needs of the pupils. These can include sensory and non-verbal communication. Staff demonstrate appropriate touch to communicate successfully with some pupils. Teachers plan effectively and with consideration to the pupils' education, health and care plans. Targets are set which reflect those in the plans. Recording of success towards targets is diligent and all small steps of progress are recorded as they are achieved. The outdoor learning areas available to each classroom enhance and extend the learning that takes place.
- Pupils make very strong progress across all areas of the curriculum. Their well-presented workbooks and the recording of their progress are robust and highly informative. Photographs and commentary in their workbooks present information and progress in a clear and informative way.
- The leadership team has a very thorough understanding of the position of the school and are continuing to increase their capacity to meet the increasing needs and numbers of pupils. The governing body supports the leadership of the school well and they have plans in place for further development of the school site. Pupils are at the forefront of all decisions made by the management of the school. Although middle leaders are in place, their roles are not yet fully developed.
- The governing body is highly experienced and appropriately skilled. They understand the school and its purpose very well. Governors provide a high level of challenge to school leaders, and they visit the school regularly. This means that they have a secure and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are dedicated in their pursuit of providing the best possible experiences for the pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to increase the effectiveness of the middle leadership in supporting the headteacher to improve the school further.

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

Yours sincerely

Sara Roe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we carried out a variety of activities to gather evidence about the quality of education at the school. We held meetings with you and a number of other school leaders and middle leaders. We visited classrooms and observed 10 lessons, six with members of the senior leadership team. We analysed school tracking systems relating to pupils' progress, attendance, behaviour and exclusions. We met with governors and with a number of pupils and staff. We considered five responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, together with the school's own information and 15 staff surveys. We also scrutinised a number of documents including the school's evaluation of its work, minutes from governing body meetings and the school development plan.