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Mr Ian Moxham  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Moxham

### **Short inspection of Ernest Cookson School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 July 2019 with Kathleen McArthur, 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

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

Leaders have built upon the strengths that were recognised in the previous report. They have also had to manage some significant events and changes since the previous inspection. For example, the headteacher agreed to take over the leadership and management of Liverpool's primary pupil referral unit (PRU) for a limited period. This was a successful initiative and was fully appreciated by the local authority. The headteacher and other leaders gained invaluable leadership and management experience during this time. Governors are currently overseeing a staffing restructure due to funding issues. Despite these challenges, both the headteacher and assistant headteacher, in particular, have provided calm, stalwart and highly effective leadership. In the meantime, the school has also been successful in securing a number of external awards, such as the 'Basic Skills Mark'.

Teaching and support staff have formed excellent relationships with the pupils in their care. Soon after arrival in school, inspectors noted the prevailing calm atmosphere. This impression was further enhanced when pupils arrived from their transport to settle quickly into their respective class bases. They were welcomed warmly by staff, including senior leaders and the caretaker. Pupils quickly chose reading books or did other independent work. They enjoyed toast and a drink prior to formal lessons. Classroom and corridor work displays celebrate pupils' achievements, especially in their reading and writing.

Leaders have ensured that the area for improvement from the last inspection has been addressed well. There are agreed systems for assessing pupils' learning, social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs. Staff make full use of this information, alongside pupils' educational, health and care (EHC) plans, to plan exceptionally well for their individual needs. Pupils have a range of targets in each of these aspects. Teaching and support staff ensure that pupils are clear about expectations in their learning and behaviour. For example, work provided takes account of pupils' ability in reading, writing and mathematics so that it is sufficiently challenging. Pupils respond well when they are asked to reflect upon how well they have behaved during lessons. They know that their actions have consequences in regard to rewards and sanctions. This contributes significantly towards their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Leaders systematically check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. They look at pupils' work together with teachers, or with the local authority school improvement partner, to check and agree on the progress made. This information is shared with parents and pupils. Different groups of pupils, including those who are most able, the disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make similar progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Ninety per cent of all pupils make good or better progress from their starting points in these subjects. Occasionally, the presentation of pupils' work and their handwriting are not of a consistently high standard, based on their abilities.

The curriculum is broad and enriching. Pupils benefit from opportunities afforded them to experience life outside the classroom. They develop their speaking and listening skills during forest school lessons. Pupils have visited places of interest while conducting a study of Liverpool. They follow up these experiences when researching related topics on the internet. Pupils enjoy practical learning experiences, for example swimming, physical education lessons and cookery. They have opportunities to learn subject-specific skills and vocabulary when studying history, geography or science.

The personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils continue to be a strength. Pupils and families have been supported to improve attendance and behaviour. The overall attendance of pupils over the past year is 93.3%, which compares favourably with some local mainstream schools. Persistent absence has reduced markedly. Fixed-term exclusion rates are low, as is the number of recorded behaviour incidents.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) monitors safeguarding issues daily to check for any trends or patterns. Record-keeping systems are very effective. There are agreed protocols in how staff report and follow up any concerns. Subsequently, there is a consistency of approach that is understood by all who teach, care for and support the pupils. Case-study evidence shows how well the DSL responds to concerns when enlisting the support of social services. Risk assessments are completed so that plans to meet individual needs are adapted to ensure pupils' safety, both in and out of school.

The DSL attends all annual review meetings of pupils' EHC plans so that any issues to do with safeguarding or child protection concerns can be raised. School leaders, alongside other agencies, ensure that parents are well supported when there are any concerns about the safety and welfare of their children. Parents spoken to value the input that they receive from the school, for example the governor-led workshops in keeping safe on the internet.

Staff and governors receive in-house updates on safeguarding. Governors review and revise policies and procedures so that these are in line with national guidance and regulations. The named governor for safeguarding visits the school to make checks on how well the agreed policies for safeguarding are followed during the school day. He gives verbal reports and recommendations to the full governing body so that it is kept informed about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

Pupils spoken to said that they learn about the impact of knife crime, quoting the saying 'No means no', when it comes to carrying knives.

Leaders ensure that daily checks are made on the attendance, behaviour, safety and learning of the small number of pupils attending off-site provision at West Derby Tuition. There is a clear culture around safeguarding.

## **Inspection findings**

- Inspectors focused on four key lines of enquiry. These were as follows: how well leaders and governors have sustained the outstanding provision; how effectively the school's planned curriculum engages pupils; how effectively the agreed policies for behaviour and attendance are implemented; and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
- Leadership and management have continued to be highly effective in building leadership capacity. Governors have supported the professional development of staff. For example, a number of teaching support staff have trained to become teachers. Aspiring leaders have undertaken relevant middle or senior management training. There is great capacity for the school to improve even further.
- Governors are well informed about the school's work, especially in its day-to-day management. However, not all governors are fully up to date with specific details of current school improvement priorities, such as curriculum development and plans to develop provision for reading and writing.
- Inspectors found that all staff are consistent in following the agreed policies in teaching, learning and assessment. For example, the pupils who have additional autism spectrum disorders benefit from skilled teaching and support. Pupils' individual plans are based upon careful analysis of their emotional, personal and social needs.
- Staff are skilled and sensitive when supporting pupils to become relaxed and ready to learn. Pupils are encouraged to think and then talk about their emotional responses to the world around them. Inspectors observed some very effective work supporting pupils who were preparing for their transition to secondary school. This

included a mix of forest school and class-based activities.

- Staff use excellent questioning and explanation techniques to draw out responses from younger pupils. Pupils' interests are captured through simple stories when introducing a lesson about simple shapes. Most pupils demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of a rhombus or triangle. The most able understood and could explain terms such as vertices and faces of shapes.
- Pupils are given opportunities to extend their reading, writing and mathematics skills in other subjects. For example, teachers and support staff encouraged pupils to persevere when looking for different features, such as beaches, rivers and mountains, on a map. Pupils were able to refer to previous learning when engaged in this activity. The most able pupils could state that goats' cheese was available in mountainous areas 'because that's where goats live'.
- In a cookery lesson, pupils enjoyed sampling different foods. This resulted in lively discussion, with pupils sharing their views and using descriptive language. Pupils' workbooks indicate that they are encouraged to follow up practical work with written accounts of experiments. Pupils use and apply taught skills in mathematics when tabulating and recording the outcomes of a fair test in science.
- During the inspection, the behaviour and attitudes of pupils in and around school were never less than good. Expectations about what is appropriate behaviour are consistently reinforced with pupils. Pupils take responsibility for their behaviour in different settings. Parents talked about the 'massive improvements' in their children's self-control and of 'amazing progress' in children's management of their own behaviour and anger, due to 'staff's skilled approach, tailored to what works best for each child's individual needs'.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- some governors sharpen further their knowledge and understanding of the school's priorities for improvement
- leaders review how handwriting is taught to pupils with complex needs, so that they have greater opportunities to improve the presentation of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Jon Ashley  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, the team met with you and the assistant headteacher. Inspectors conducted joint observations of lessons in each of the classes. This included an observation of a forest school lesson. A meeting was held with the chair of governors, and brief discussions took place with two other governors. A meeting was held with the school's advisor, who provided an up-to-date summary report about the school's work. Inspectors looked at pupils' workbooks, folders and also classroom displays. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct and attitudes on arrival to the school, on the school corridors, at breaktimes and lunchtime. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's review of its strengths and areas to develop, the school development plan and information about pupils' EHC plans, ability, progress and outcomes. Inspectors also looked at documentation relating to the following: safeguarding, including safe recruitment of staff and risk assessments; behaviour and attendance; and governing body reports and minutes of their meetings.

An inspector met formally with a group of pupils to seek their views about the school. An inspector met with three parents who were on site early in the day. There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. However, inspectors considered three free text responses from parents. There were no responses to the pupils' online survey. Inspectors looked at three responses to the online staff questionnaire.