

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Melanie Hall  
Headteacher  
Lancaster School  
Prittlewell Chase  
Westcliff-on-Sea  
Essex  
SS0 0RT

Dear Mrs Hall

### **Short inspection of Lancaster School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 March 2017 with Paul Copping, 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 June 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, and continues to improve this provision.

Lancaster School is a vibrant, warm and inclusive place, where young people look forward to each and every experience you provide for them. From entering the building, it is clear to the visitor that it is an environment that celebrates students' successes. In particular, there is a display board that highlights the varied and successful destinations that some of your students achieve when they leave you. This is an emotive reminder of your determined vision that your students should have the same life chances as any other young person.

Students arrive at the school with varied needs, but a high number of these young people have significant physical and/or neurological needs. Since the previous inspection, you have been emphatic that students' personal care and learning needs are equally important in staff's work. Consequently, young people's care needs are met seamlessly throughout the day, in a way that still affords them dignity and does not detract from their opportunities to have good learning experiences.

In most lessons, teachers and teaching assistants plan effectively to work as a cohesive team. For example, in one lesson, students were undertaking a practical lesson on personal hygiene using a series of sensory experiences. Each adult in the room knew insightfully how to ensure that the activities, including skin care and dental routines, were made accessible to these students. The time was used productively so that each student's understanding of these routines was embedded more effectively.

The previous inspection judged behaviour to be outstanding and this is clearly still the case. Students who showed me around over the lunchbreak were glowing in their praise for how the school develops a sense of community, where everyone looks after each other. One young woman described the school and staff as, 'gorgeous' and 'wonderful', while another student explained that she was learning Makaton, as she wanted to support a younger pupil with his communication. Students love attending Lancaster School, and consequently, continue to bring energy, enthusiasm and positivity to its corridors.

You have developed the facilities and resources in the school since the previous inspection. The outdoor area is a delightful mix of social areas, sporting opportunities, and a winding, open sensory garden space. Students take ownership of these areas, and care for them. Indoors, classrooms are well organised so that students' walking aids, wheelchairs and standing frames are accommodated without impinging on students' movement and freedom. Your deputy headteacher's work to bring about vibrancy through music is reflected in the well-resourced and decorated music room, which students enjoy using frequently.

Swimming, horse riding, pottery and various sports are just some of the activities that students undertake each week. Students also attend college, go on trips and visits, and undertake work experience, so that they apply the skills they learn in school in the real world. You develop students' social skills that open up broader opportunities for them. You support students to use public transport independently, as well as building their confidence to walk daily to and from school.

Most parents are effusive in their praise for the school. In particular, parents are delighted with you, as the headteacher, for bringing continued improvements to the school, and to their children's lives. They identify that you are passionate and dedicated to giving better life chances to their children.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A key line of enquiry in the inspection was to check how far the school keeps students safe. You, as the designated safeguarding leader, ensure that your staff are well trained in identifying and reporting any concerns about the well-being of your students. Your team is particularly aware of the importance of vigilance, given students' many and varied challenges and needs. Written records are kept studiously, and act as a good record of the actions taken by you and others in keeping students safe.

The safeguarding policy on the website did not reflect the most up-to-date guidance, although this was addressed quickly while we were on site.

You and your staff work effectively with external agencies to support students, such as medical, healthcare and social care teams. You work closely with the professionals from these services to ensure that students receive joined-up support from you all. The communication between yourselves and these professionals is making a positive difference in the care that you give to your students.

You appreciate that attendance and safeguarding students' well-being are closely linked. Attendance remains below the national average for schools. Some of this is due to unavoidable medical issues that students face. You monitor attendance meticulously, and tenaciously support parents and carers in getting students into school regularly. This is making a real difference in helping to get more students into school frequently, and on time. Most notably, the extensive support for young people who are looked after and for their carers is ensuring that the attendance of these students is consistently high.

You also ensure that staff are trained appropriately in manual handling and using hoisting equipment on an annual basis. You ensure that staff use this training appropriately, although you do not formally record these additional quality assurance checks.

While safeguarding is thoroughly effective, we discussed the importance of ensuring that you continue to delegate some of this caseload to your deputy headteacher, as the deputy designated leader, so that in the longer term, it is sustainable and your expertise can be disseminated.

### **Inspection findings**

- One of the key lines of enquiry was how far you had developed the assessment system since the previous inspection. Your skilled deputy headteacher has brought significant improvements to this area of the school's work. All students are assessed thoroughly on their entry to the school so that you have a clear sense of their varied starting points. It is from this thorough starting point that students are allocated a curriculum pathway that best suits their needs.
- Your school leaders have developed a number of well-thought-out curriculum pathways, especially for students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Students access a range of different levels of qualifications, mainly linked to the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) effectively, and feel real delight in their successes. This achievement is monitored well by teachers, leaders and governors.

- Although some students in the past have accessed higher level qualifications, this is not something that is currently available for the small numbers of students for whom it may be appropriate. You are making arrangements to move into an academy trust with three other specialist schools in September 2017, which you believe will provide you with further capacity to provide these qualifications, including more vocational opportunities.
- Your ongoing assessment system, while measuring academic progress routinely, is not as effective at formally measuring other aspects of students' progress as regularly, such as their cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development.
- Your deputy headteacher is currently working tirelessly and meticulously to research a varied range of assessment systems for non-academic learning, so that he can find the best methods to use in the school. This will allow leaders, governors and staff to further sharpen and clarify their expectations of what good and outstanding progress is within the school, and to fully and formally evaluate how effective the school is.
- Another key line of enquiry was to look at how teachers plan to meet students' needs. Teachers plan lessons with a good understanding of students' needs. For example, in one lesson, students were being asked to look at aspects of independent living, but undertaking activities appropriate to their understanding of basic health and safety. Students with less physical mobility were also being encouraged to develop their use of their communication boards, or to develop their physical mobility, through independent movement around the room.
- Despite the obvious strengths in teaching, learning and assessment, teachers and other adults do not yet consistently identify when some students are ready to move on more quickly, or to start at a higher level. This includes the most able students. This means that, on occasion, students are repeating work, and/or skills, without deepening their understanding or moving on when they are ready.
- Governors bring a range of expertise to the school, and use this in their visits to the school to champion even more opportunities for your students. They monitor the use of additional funding and safeguarding with particular rigour. While governors have an understanding of academic progress, they do not have a systematic way of reviewing students' overall progress in all aspects of their development.
- Another key line of enquiry was to look at how you are supporting students to develop independence and prepare them for their future. All students achieve next-step provision when they leave you. You support students to attend 'taster' days at their college, as well as actively training them to use public transport appropriately. Students are confident, although understandably nervous, about their next steps. They are also sad to be leaving your school. Many students stay in contact for many years after leaving you, and these are the students you rightly celebrate on your display board. Some of your current students look at the display board as an inspiration for their own future.

- While you ensure that all students have a formal next step, you are not currently monitoring whether they sustain this destination. You identify that this information would give you a better understanding of students' longer term success.
- You are rightly proud of the opportunities that you give students to give their opinions about the school. For example, opportunities over the lunchbreaks have been created directly because of students' requests. We discussed how you are continuing to ensure that all students' communicative skills are being developed, especially those who are in the early stages of developing signing. Most notably, we heard how you are continuing to develop staff skills in using different forms of sign language to support those who are new to the school.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able, and those who are ready to achieve more, are supported in lessons to deepen their knowledge and develop skills, and consequently receive access to higher level qualifications and vocational opportunities, where appropriate
- assessment and monitoring systems are further embedded and refined, including keeping track of all students' longer term success after they leave you, and formally recording the impact of the quality assurance work that goes on. In these ways, leaders and governors can evaluate their effectiveness more routinely, and staff can use this information to intervene even more precisely.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we spoke with you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. We met a healthcare professional and a dance therapist, and spoke to a number of staff. We visited classrooms and undertook a scrutiny of students' work while we were in some of those lessons. We spoke with students throughout the day, and met with a small group of students formally.

We took account of the free-text messages on Ofsted's online questionnaire from four parents, as well as 32 staff responses. We spoke to several parents on the telephone and looked at the school's own surveys of parents and carers. We also reviewed an array of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding and students' progress.