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Mr Christian Whelan
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Dear Mr Whelan

Short inspection of Newfield School

Following my visit to the school on 12 April 2018 with Linda 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 May 2014.

Since the previous inspection, you and the deputy headteacher are new to your roles.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staff and leaders continue to give skilful aid to pupils whose complex social, emotional or mental health needs mean that they struggle to attend or succeed in mainstream schools. Leaders' effective arrangements to support staff, enhance pupils' learning and develop the school show that the quality of education at Newfield is improving well.

As the new headteacher, you set an ambitious vision for the school and show determination in improving steadily the quality of pupils' learning. You and the deputy headteacher share a clear understanding of what successful teaching looks like. Relationships between leaders, staff and pupils are positive and respectful.

Leaders make sure that they are visible around the school. They take a genuine interest in the lives of pupils because they want them to flourish. Leaders identify the many barriers to pupils' participation and success. They think ever more creatively about what the school can do in response, for example in adapting the school timetable and study placements around pupils' complex and challenging circumstances.

Following the previous inspection, the standard of education at the school dipped. The quality of leadership, teaching and pupils' outcomes weakened. The local authority acted promptly to establish extra guidance and assistance for staff and leaders. This help, the appointment of new leaders and the work of school governors are improving the school quickly. Pupils at Newfield are once again learning successfully. Regeneration is evident throughout the school's work. It is no surprise that the school is full and has a waiting list. The proportion of pupils who continue with their education and training after leaving the school is improving rapidly.

When inspectors visited the school previously, they recommended that leaders improve the calibre of teaching. You have achieved this by giving staff increased opportunities to learn from the work of colleagues in other schools, including teaching schools. Leaders guide staff to question pupils more skilfully and to better match activities to pupils' needs.

Inspectors also asked senior leaders to raise pupils' achievement by increasing the range of accredited learning and by developing the role of middle leaders. You have concentrated carefully on these aspects of the school. For example, pupils now gain accreditation for their personal and social skills, alongside their vocational skills. Middle leaders now play a crucial role in the advancement of the school and you have precise plans in place to refine their skills further.

The governing body supports you ably. The governors bring a wide range of skills and interests to their roles. Governors have a clear and realistic understanding of the history, current development and future direction of the school. They are strongly committed to encouraging and challenging leaders to move the school even further forward.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders train staff fully to spot and report concerns about pupils' care and well-being. They meet frequently with other agencies to protect pupils. Leaders make certain that the school curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe at school and at home. Staff are vigilant and understand local and national safeguarding risks to pupils, such as the existence of gangs outside the school. Staff know how to respond where pupils have been exposed to radicalised views of modern Britain. Leaders keep records carefully of safeguarding issues. They have invested recently in an electronic system to enhance their recording and oversight of pupils' increasingly complex lives. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Even so, the roles of leaders to further coordinate this aspect of the school's work are underdeveloped.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders boost and challenge the work of staff carefully. They give teachers purposeful targets for improvement and good opportunities for training and development. Leaders track precisely pupils' attainment and progress. They review this information thoroughly, identifying where they and staff need to give pupils further support. Middle leaders make a positive difference to the work of staff in teaching different subjects, for example in mathematics and English. Nevertheless, senior leaders acknowledge that further work is required to ensure that science is led equally strongly.
- Teaching staff are becoming more confident and creative in developing activities to inspire pupils. During the inspection, one inspector followed the fine smell of sizzling chicken wafting through the school. He discovered pupils engrossed in cooking, having purchased ingredients for their own recipe at the local supermarket.
- The number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour requiring staff to use physical intervention is now far fewer than in the past. This is because leaders and staff now guide and encourage pupils skilfully towards managing their own feelings and behaviour. Staff reward pupils' positive behaviour, for example by granting the top-scoring pupils a trip to Blackpool. High expectations for pupils' school uniform and their wider behaviour, such as not carrying a mobile phone in school, are developing a positive and respectful ethos in classrooms. The result of all these actions is that pupils' behaviour while attending Newfield improves well.
- Many pupils attend school far more regularly than they did in their previous school. Pupils who have previously refused to attend other schools start to change their behaviour when coming to Newfield. They willingly begin to attend activities and placements because they feel that the school accepts and acknowledges their uniqueness. Pupils told inspectors that this is a school that understands them. When pupils move to other towns and cities, leaders keep pupils on the school roll until they are satisfied that new schooling is in place. They are determined that every pupil is protected and given a helping hand to succeed.
- Current pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. They arrive at Newfield with widely differing and often negative experiences of education. Pupils may have gaps in their learning and patchy experience of regular schooling. Their previous success may have faltered. This means that many pupils are working at standards below those expected for their age. However, staff and leaders provide pupils with opportunities that re-ignite their self-belief and confidence. Staff recognise pupils' individual strengths and interests and use these to re-engage pupils in worthwhile learning. Leaders are determined to see outcomes for pupils further improve. They are taking thoughtful action to assure that pupils make better progress this term and beyond. We agreed that some of the most able pupils need to be challenged even more, so they excel in their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching, including for the most able pupils, increases further pupils' progress across subjects, throughout this academic year and beyond
- plans to strengthen the leadership of science and safeguarding result in even better coordination of these aspects of the school's 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 Sefton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors visited classes jointly with senior leaders and spoke with pupils and staff. An inspector spoke separately with a group of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the premises and as they arrived at and departed from school. Inspectors considered information from leaders and the local authority about the improvement of leadership, teaching and learning. They reviewed school information about pupils' starting points and their progress, as well as case studies of individual pupils. Inspectors considered examples of pupils' current work. They spoke with senior leaders about their evaluation of the school and their development plans. An inspector met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body. Inspectors spoke by telephone with the local authority school improvement partner and with an external consultant who works with the school. Inspectors met with members of the school's safeguarding team. Together with senior leaders and the school administrator, inspectors checked the school's records of staff suitability to work with children. They sampled school records about safeguarding issues. There were too few responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire to consider. An inspector spoke with some parents and reviewed information from the school's surveys of parents' views. Inspectors considered responses from 50 pupils and 32 staff to Ofsted's online questionnaires.