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Mrs Ann-Marie Ellis
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Dear Mrs Ellis

Short inspection of The Dales School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 2018 with Patricia Head, 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 November 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

At the time of your appointment as headteacher, you fully evaluated the quality of provision at school. You did this to ensure that any development plans that you put into place were based on firm evidence, and that they focused on the correct areas of school life. You identified several aspects that needed to improve. Since then, you have worked tirelessly to ensure that the school offers the very best for the pupils and students in its care. However, you fully realise that there is still work to do to ensure that the quality of provision matches the excellent standard described in the previous inspection report.

One parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) wrote: 'The Headteacher has transformed the atmosphere at school. The pupils are at the centre of everything that the school does and that is reflected in how well our daughter has thrived.' This comment is typical of many. Your leadership is characterised by determination, empathy, and a genuine care for your pupils.

You leave no stone unturned in your pursuit for excellence, and you have high expectations of your pupils and staff. Your deputy headteacher, similarly, has a keen eye for detail, and is highly proficient in collecting and analysing information about the progress that pupils are making and the standards that they are reaching. The systems that she has developed to monitor the quality of teaching at the school

are strong.

You and your deputy headteacher now have a proven track record of improving provision at the school. Last year, for example, you noticed that the progress that some girls were making in their personal and social development was not strong enough. You also noticed that some teachers' expectations of pupils who have autism spectrum disorder were not as high as they could have been, and their questioning did not deepen these pupils' thinking enough. As a result of the changes that you made, and the training that you put into place, these groups of pupils now make strong progress.

Teaching in the early years and in primary and secondary classes (Years 7 to 11) is strong. It is characterised by planning that effectively meets the needs of pupils, and an appropriate focus on supporting them both emotionally and physically. The themes and topics that you have chosen as a basis for the curriculum are both relevant and interesting. In primary classes, your planning includes additional activities which you call 'suitcase for life'. Here, you ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their background or ability, have experiences that are important in childhood. You ensure, for example, that building a snowman, or singing 'The wheels on the bus' while doing the actions, are enjoyed by all of your pupils.

You are acutely aware that the quality of provision for students in the sixth form is less strong than in other classes. Your deputy headteacher has started to use the monitoring systems used in the early years and primary classes within the sixth form. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving. You know, however, that the systems for checking the progress that sixth-form students are making, and the standards that they are reaching, are not fully embedded. You accept that planning for sixth-form students' individual needs is not as strong as in other key stages at school.

In dealing with other areas of school life, you admit that keeping the website up to date with high-quality information has not been a priority for you. You are aware that the school website is not fully compliant with statutory requirements and are planning to address this.

In seeking to improve the quality of education at school, you have been successful in rallying your staff and improving morale. You have developed an increasingly strong team of middle leaders, all of whom are involved in 'strategic planning action groups'. These groups focus on different aspects of the school, such as the use of technology in lessons, developing mechanisms to consider pupils' views, careers and enterprise, and personal, social and health education.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding procedures are alive at school and are understood by staff. Policies used to keep pupils safe are effective, and staff training is up to date. An example of this is the care that is taken to ensure that pupils arrive safely into school from taxis or other means of transport, and that they move safely around the building.

Pupils at your school are well cared for, and typically feel safe and secure. Staff are well equipped to deal with the additional medical needs that some of your pupils have. Additional therapies and support are also in place for some of these pupils, as required.

Students in the sixth form are happy. The curriculum is supporting them to develop their independence, and their social and personal skills. During our visit, inspectors observed students in lessons preparing a four-course lunch as part of their studies, and we dined together with them. Students talked animatedly about their work placements and told us all about their school with pride. They enjoy making and selling scones, including at the 'pop-up stall' in town. They were effusive about the time when they made their own sausages using a machine. They certainly enjoyed the karaoke in the hall after they had finished their lunch. You clearly offer experiences that support students' wider personal development, and they appreciate these efforts.

The plans that you have put in place to ensure that students are ready for when they have to leave school are strong, and you work well with other agencies to ensure that students have the support they need to this end. You are tenacious in this.

Pupils' attendance is relatively low, and the proportion of pupils that are persistently absent is high. This is primarily due to the health needs of many of your pupils, some of whom require regular hospital admissions. There are checks and balances in place to ensure that pupils are safe when they are not in school. We noted together, however, that the systems used to monitor the quality of teaching are more robust than those around attendance.

Policies and procedures, staff training, additional support for the health needs of your pupils, together with specific curriculum activities, all help to ensure that there is a culture of safeguarding at school.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I wanted to find out how effective your curriculum is in ensuring that the needs of your pupils are met. Inspection evidence confirms that topics, themes and planning engage pupils and support them as individuals to make strong progress. This is especially the case for pupils in the early years, and in primary and secondary classes. You teach pupils in classes according to their abilities rather than their chronological age, which helps teachers and teaching assistants support pupils' needs.
- Your teachers use a wide variety of information in order to assess how well individual pupils are progressing. They keenly observe pupils in lessons and make high-quality notes as to how pupils are developing. Teachers and other adults make good use of a 'post-it system' to capture any evidence of progress, and this, combined with an effective use of photographic evidence, helps teachers know what to plan next for individual pupils. This system is less robust in the sixth form. Nonetheless, the curriculum and your systems for checking pupils'

progress knit together well to ensure that your pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

- One of my areas of focus was the quality of education in the sixth form. Your honest self-evaluation and school development plans were already firmly focused on this area of school life. Work is well under way to improve sixth-form provision. Nonetheless, your sixth form has some significant strengths in the way that it develops students' independence and prepares them for life after school. Individual plans take note of students' interests and hopes. You use the mantra 'nothing about me without me' to make sure that students are always at the heart of the curriculum. Teachers plan lessons that engage students, but systems to pinpoint precise next steps for individuals are not as tight as they are in other classes.
- Your 'cause for concern' slips, on which teachers and other adults share information about any area of school life, whether this be pupil performance, safeguarding concerns or lesson planning, help you to identify any changes that you need to make. You indicated that these have been pivotal in some areas of development planning.
- One of my lines of questioning was around the effectiveness of leadership at school. I find you and the senior team to be highly effective, and your middle leaders to be developing their skills at a pace. Your governing body, although not currently at full capacity, is led by a chair and vice-chair who have both the skills and experience to support you and offer further challenge when needed.
- In the previous inspection, the school was praised for the way in which it supported stakeholders and engaged with the local community. I wanted to see if this was still the case. You and other leaders have indeed ensured that this strength has both continued and developed. Of note is the 'passport to the future event' that you support, and that takes place at your school. Here, pupils receive information regarding employment, training, and health, social and residential provision as they prepare for adulthood.
- You work well with parents and carers, and share aspects of the curriculum with them, so that they too can observe their children and note any evidence of improvement in their skills or abilities. Sixth formers who were practising stripping and making beds were less excited about their parents knowing about, and then homing in on, this newly acquired skill!
- Although not an area of focus for this inspection, I note the quality of provision in the early years. This has been a strength of the school for several years now. Indeed, it is precisely the monitoring and pinpointing of children's next steps in the early years that has been extended to, and adapted for, other classes and key stages at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems for checking the progress that sixth-form students are making, and the standards that they are reaching, are fully embedded
- planning for sixth-form students' individual needs is as strong as it is in other key stages at school
- the tracking and analysis of attendance data is improved
- the school website is fully compliant with statutory requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and school business manager. I also met a group of your middle leaders. You, together with your deputy headteacher, presented information detailing pupils' progress and attainment, the school's self-evaluation document and the school development plan. An inspector spoke with colleagues responsible for safeguarding and attendance. I spoke with two members of the governing body, including the chair. You and your deputy headteacher joined inspectors as we observed teaching and learning across the school. We met with a group of sixth-form students at lunchtime and spoke to other pupils at breaktime. We reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and different classes. I discussed the school's effectiveness with a representative of the local authority. We also reviewed a wide variety of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website. I also considered the responses to Parent View.

This inspection particularly focused on a number of key questions:

- How effective is the curriculum in meeting the needs of pupils at school? Do pupils still make strides in both their personal and academic development?
- Are sixth-form students pushed enough to make appropriate gains in their learning and to develop independence, so that they are fully prepared for the next stages of their lives?
- Are school leaders and governors tenacious in seeking excellence in all areas of school life, given the lack of compliance with statutory requirements on the website?

- Is the work that the school undertakes with parents and the wider community still a particular strength?
- To what extent are vulnerable pupils being supported, and to what extent are they kept safe, given the relatively high rates of absence and persistent absence?