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Mr P Arrowsmith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Arrowsmith

Short inspection of Wirral Hospitals' School

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019 with Bernard Robinson, 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 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership team are ambitious in your planning and know what you want to achieve to improve the quality of education for your pupils. Leaders have created a warm and welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and so begin to re-engage in education and enjoy learning again. This does not happen by chance. The highly skilled staff show respect, patience and kindness. This gains the trust of each pupil and develops into a strong working relationship where pupils gain confidence and begin to thrive and succeed. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and its impact on their children's personal and academic progress. Typical comments from parents about the school's effectiveness included that it is 'a glimmer of hope' and 'a lifeline'. One parent summarised the views of many others, saying: 'My child is now attending school, participating in physical activities, chess club and singing.'

Since the last inspection, you have worked closely with the local authority's child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and educational psychology services to ensure that the school's admissions procedure is rigorous and transparent. Mainstream schools are now more aware of the support they can provide for pupils with physical or mental-health needs, which has resulted in fewer referrals to the Wirral Hospitals' School. However, although referrals to the school have declined, there has been an increase in the number of pupils arriving at the school with more complex needs, including pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

Leaders have been quick to respond to the changing needs of pupils. The school has implemented visual-communication systems which support pupils with autism spectrum disorder. For example, a notice board in the entrance hall shows images of visitors to the school that day so pupils are less anxious on seeing a new face. Staff, pupils and parents have undertaken training to adapt their language to support communication and understanding of others in social situations. This good practice was recognised by the National Autistic Society when the school gained the Autism Accreditation Award in November 2017. Parents appreciate the support they receive and one comment typified many: 'The school has excellent social-communication teaching programmes for pupils and parents.' The new strategies used across the school and at home have had a dramatic impact on improving pupils' communication skills and have given pupils confidence in social situations.

Pupils' outcomes continue to be outstanding. The curriculum supports pupils' progress across academic, creative and vocational options. This broad range of subjects ensures that pupils make outstanding progress academically, socially and emotionally. Leaders are quick to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs and aspirations of pupils. For example, music GCSE has recently been introduced and is now one of the most successful subjects. Pupils have the opportunity to study eight GCSEs alongside other nationally recognised qualifications, such as the BTEC National Diploma.

Careers information, education, advice and guidance support pupils throughout the school in exploring their options. External visits to colleges, universities and workplaces help pupils to make appropriate choices. Leaders work successfully on transition plans with post-16 providers and consequently the vast majority of Year 11 pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their studies or employment. While most students remain on their further education course, a small minority of pupils find the next stage in their education a challenge. This is because the expectations within the college environment are simply too much too soon. Leaders are working with post-16 providers to implement systems and support to ensure that pupils with more complex needs are successful and complete their studies. However, this work is in its early stages and needs further development.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The systems and procedures at Arrowe Park Hospital and the Joseph Paxton Campus are robust. Staff know pupils extremely well and work quickly with the hospitals, CAMHS and the local authority to safeguard pupils when needed. Referrals to the local authority and other agencies are followed up quickly.

All safeguarding records are detailed, thorough and securely held. The chair of the governing body takes an active role in supporting the designated safeguarding lead and is thorough in her role of ensuring that pupils remain safe. Staff training is up to date, compliant and meets statutory requirements. Governors have also implemented a robust recruitment and induction programme for new staff. Consequently, all staff have the knowledge, skills and ability to maintain the school's

strong safeguarding culture.

Parents spoke very highly of the school and talked about the caring, nurturing and safe environment. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe in school and 100% would recommend the school to another parent.

Inspection findings

- One of the key lines of enquiry I explored with you was whether the quality of teaching and learning continued to be outstanding. Pupils often start at the school following long periods of absence from their mainstream school. Time is taken to assess pupils so that teachers can match work to each pupil's ability. Across the Joseph Paxton Campus, pupils are engaged, motivated and clearly enjoy their learning. Teachers are skilled in asking the right questions but also allow time for pupils to think and respond. As a result, pupils are confident in answering questions and having a go at challenging problems. For example, in a mathematics class on correlation and scatter graphs, short, focused questions enabled pupils to work out the difference between a correlation and a non-correlation.
- Teaching at the Arrowe Park Hospital takes place on the ward. Pupils may be in hospital for short or long periods of time. Through a skilled bedside manner, the teacher quickly builds rapport with pupils, who have significant medical needs. The wide range of resources and creative lessons ensures that pupils respond and engage with their learning as well as they can. Teachers work closely with National Health Service staff, who are very complimentary about the school's work. Parents value the hospital tuition and appreciate that their children can continue their education in the hospital environment. Between the two school bases the curriculum is well planned and teaching is accurately focused in response to the regular and detailed assessment of pupils' learning. This allows pupils to make outstanding progress. The quality of teaching and learning in this school continues to be outstanding.
- I also looked at pupils' behaviour and whether it continued to be a strength of the school. The school environment supports the emotional and mental health needs of the pupils very well. There are small, quiet spaces, including a sensory room, should pupils need time away from stimulation. Small one-to-one rooms allow time for discussion and support. Teachers help pupils to understand how they can use specific physical activities such as throwing a ball or jumping to calm themselves down or stimulate their senses so that they are ready for learning. The school's systems and procedures work exceptionally well to enable pupils to regulate their own emotions and consequently their behaviour continues to be outstanding.
- Finally, I considered pupils' attendance. After they start at the school, pupils' attendance improves and in some cases there is a dramatic improvement. Attendance data is monitored and analysed closely by leaders. Staff are quick to identify when a pupil's attendance begins to dip. Strategies are implemented to support pupils and their families in resolving problems and getting back on track.

Staff refer problems to other agencies and arrange specialist support if needed. Leaders also closely monitor the attendance of different groups of pupils and in some year groups disadvantaged pupils have better attendance than other pupils. The positive ethos and atmosphere contribute considerably to pupils wanting to come to school. Their enjoyment of education is reflected in their excellent attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work with stakeholders so that pupils with the most complex needs are further supported to move on to the next stage in their education successfully.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Bather
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you and senior leaders. They held a meeting with two members of the governing body, including the chair. They met with the safeguarding leads and scrutinised paperwork and safeguarding records, including the record of checks completed on staff. Joint learning walks with leaders were completed and pupils' books and learning records were scrutinised. There were 17 responses to Parent View and inspectors met with 10 parents. They took account of the 26 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff, spoke to staff during the day and also met formally with a small group of staff. Inspectors spoke with pupils informally during the day and met formally with six pupils. They observed behaviour in lessons and around the school. Documents were scrutinised, including information about pupils' progress; the school's self-evaluation; the school-improvement plan; records of pupils' attendance and information relating to the work of the governing body.