

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Liza Ashworth
Head of Centre
Pine Lodge Short Stay School
Pine Lodge Adolescent Psychiatric Unit
79 Liverpool Road
Chester
CH2 1AW

Dear Mrs Ashworth

Short inspection of Pine Lodge Short Stay School

Following my visit to the school on 10 November 2015 with Pippa Jackson-Maitland, Her Majesty's 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 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has strengthened the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and maintained the excellent quality of education. Leaders and other adults have an in-depth knowledge of the specific needs of every pupil who attends the school. Information about pupils, gleaned from other professionals, such as the clinical team of Pine Lodge Adolescent Psychiatric Unit, parents and the pupils themselves, is used effectively to form the bedrock of excellent education, care, guidance and support.

Adults' collective desire to ensure that each pupil has the best opportunity to succeed when they leave the school permeates every aspect of the school's work. Leaders and staff do not shy away from holding the highest of expectations in terms of pupils' academic achievement. This, coupled with an equally strong drive to ensure that pupils rise to the challenge presented by their mental health problems, leads to outstanding outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Systems to check the suitability of staff to work with children and young people are in place and meet requirements. Policies and procedures to safeguard pupils are used effectively by well-trained staff. The school's own records show that adults at the school act appropriately and promptly when they have concerns about the safety of pupils.

Effective communication between adults working at the school and the clinical team from the adolescent psychiatric unit strengthens safeguarding practices further. During the inspection, school staff were observed to work closely with the clinical team in order to reduce the risk of harm to a pupil. The appropriate combination of sensitivity and firmness ensured that this pupil remained safe.

Leaders have put in place robust procedures to ensure that, when pupils leave the school, information about their specific needs, including that relating to keeping them safe, is passed to the appropriate professionals.

Inspection findings

- Leaders' own evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is accurate. Leaders canvas the views of parents, pupils, staff and other professionals in order to inform their judgements on the quality of the provision. Leaders have identified that they need to link their actions even more precisely to the impact they have on pupils' outcomes in order to maintain and build on the high standard already achieved by the school.
- The quality of teaching has continued to be a strength of the school. Teachers use expertly their assessment information to plan lessons which meet pupils' specific needs. Teachers and support staff are sensitive to changes in pupils' emotional needs. For example, teachers were observed to modify planned activities in order to ensure that one pupil benefited from an impromptu counselling lesson.
- Teachers' flexibility ensures that the impact on pupils' academic progress, as a result of changes in their emotional well-being, for example, is minimised. Teachers and other adults modify skilfully their level and style of challenge as pupils progress through the school. This action leads often to a change from the pupil being motivated by staff to the pupil being self-motivated. As a result, pupils' resilience is strengthened in readiness for their next steps.
- Leaders' and teachers' expectations of the standards that pupils can reach are high. Strong relationships between adults and pupils allow teachers to model good learning practice. For example, teachers show that it is acceptable to make mistakes and learn from them, something which many pupils find difficult to accept when they start at the school. This leads to many pupils overcoming their fear of failure and reaching the highest grades at GCSE level.
- Teachers and adults use every opportunity to challenge and stretch pupils so that they close the gaps in learning that had previously opened up between them and their peers. For example, in a mathematics lesson a pupil was encouraged successfully to reflect on her previous learning and use this to develop her own strategy to solve a mathematical problem. This approach often leads to pupils, particularly the most able, exceeding expectations in terms of academic achievement.

- The management and leadership of teaching are strong. Effective systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching. Teachers observe one another's lessons and pupils benefit from teachers' sharing of excellent practice. Leaders have identified that this aspect of the school's work could be strengthened further by ensuring that the feedback given to teachers links precisely to the impact of teachers' actions on pupils' learning.
- Effective communication between the school team and the clinical team supports well the personal development of pupils. Adults' use of praise is particularly effective because it is linked seamlessly to pupils' personal daily targets which are agreed during the morning 'community' meeting. Pupils know exactly why they are being praised and can build on their positive steps. This contributes to pupils' developing their ability to overcome their own fears, and supports well their next steps into mainstream school or college. Testament to this is the school's own information which shows that out of the 85 pupils who were on roll at the school during last year, only three were re-admitted for further support.
- Leaders make effective use of external support to ensure that the high-quality provision is maintained. Strong links with the local authority are used effectively to ensure that adults are trained well. For example, during the inspection the English teacher was involved in training in the assessment of progress being provided by the local authority. Leaders have booked additional training for staff in order to strengthen further the school's safeguarding procedures. Additional training for staff, provided by senior professionals of the clinical team, boosts adults' understanding of pupils' specific needs and medical conditions. Leaders have established strong links with the local and wider community, for example a local educational farm, and use these to build pupils' self-esteem and strengthen their confidence to meet the demands of life beyond school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- feedback to teachers on how to improve their teaching even further focuses sharply on the impact of their actions on pupils' learning
- leaders evaluate even more precisely the impact of their actions on pupils' academic and personal development.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We had conversations with you and the executive headteacher, other leaders, the chair of the management committee, teachers, a small number of parents and several pupils.
- We observed a selection of lessons across the school.
- We looked at pupils' work during our visits to classrooms. We also scrutinised samples of pupils' work displayed on walls around the school.
- We observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils as they arrived and left school.
- We scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school including self-evaluation by leaders; the school development plan; information on attendance; documents used to record behaviour and safeguarding concerns; information relating to pupils' progress; the results of the school's surveys of parents' and pupils' opinions; records of leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning, and of performance management; and minutes of meetings of the management committee.
- We took account of responses by eight adults and four pupils to surveys which were carried out on the day of the inspection.