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Mrs Jane Pepa
Headteacher
Clifford Holroyde Specialist Sen College
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Dear Mrs Pepa

Short inspection of Clifford Holroyde Specialist Sen College

Following my visit to the school on 2 July 2019 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

There have been significant changes and challenges for the school since the last inspection. The school has had two new headteachers, faced closure, and the number of pupils on roll has increased significantly. You joined the school in January 2018. Since then you have created a school where the development of pupils' emotional health and well-being is a key priority.

You have a clear vision for your school. This is that pupils will develop emotionally while attending your school. You believe strongly that, as a result, they will then be able to achieve academically. Staff and governors share your vision. Pupils also understand the impact of this approach. As one pupil said: 'You stop acting like a kid and grow up. You are controlling you'.

Staff enjoy working at your school. They recognise that following a period of uncertainty and change there is now a strong staff team. Staff fully support the focus on developing pupils' emotional health and well-being. The emphasis on helping pupils to understand their feelings has been a fundamental change for the school. They can see the positive impact of the training they have received to support this aspect of their work. It has helped them understand better the needs of the pupils. This has improved relationships with pupils. As a result, teaching has improved, and pupils are making better progress.

Governors are proud to work with the school. When the school was facing closure, they played a prominent role in successfully challenging the decision. Governors understand the school's strengths and are aware of the areas where improvement is still required. They challenge leaders effectively. For example, when you first suggested introducing the programme for developing pupils' emotional health and well-being governors asked probing questions. Governors had concerns about this new approach. They were also concerned about the effect on the school of your absence during training. Having received the necessary reassurances, they fully backed the project. Two governors have attended the in-school training for staff so that they have a clear understanding of what is being developed in school.

The local authority now has confidence in the school. The increased number of pupils attending the school demonstrates this. It is also evident in the local authority's plans to invest in the school building to improve facilities for staff and pupils. A local authority representative shared a comment from a parent: 'I never imagined how far my son would come while at this school.'

At the time of the last inspection leaders were asked to challenge the most able pupils to make the best possible progress. This has been successfully resolved. Leaders have thorough systems in place to identify the most able pupils. The progress of these pupils is carefully monitored. If a pupil is falling behind, the reasons are analysed, and appropriate support put in place. Entering pupils for qualifications before the end of year 11 helps to build their confidence in sitting exams. The result of this approach has been an increase in the number of pupils obtaining GCSEs in English and mathematics.

Improving the rate of progress by pupils in English was another area for improvement from the last inspection. Leaders have increased the focus on developing literacy skills across all subjects. Assessment of pupils' literacy skills takes place on arrival at the school. In pupils' books in all subjects there are individual literacy targets. This enables all teachers to focus on developing pupils' ability in English. This has resulted in progress and outcomes in English rising to the same level as in mathematics.

Leaders were also asked to develop closer links with other schools to improve the accuracy of assessments. This has been addressed effectively. The school has joined a network of local schools to share good practice and compare the quality of pupils' work. This gives leaders confidence in the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff know pupils very well. Each morning pupils are informally assessed, and staff notice any changes of behaviour. An experienced member of staff is available to spend time with any unsettled pupils. This gives those pupils time to settle and prepare to engage in learning. It also gives staff the opportunity to assess if there are significant issues that need addressing.

Effective policies are in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Staff are trained successfully. Consequently, staff know the actions they must take if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare. The designated safeguarding lead examines trends in

behaviour incidents and attendance. This gives leaders an overview of behaviour in the school. Regular meetings with external professionals consider the more complex cases. This ensures that there is good communication and a multi-agency response to support pupils and their families.

The arrangements for staff recruitment, vetting and training are suitable and up to date. The single central record of checks is maintained diligently. Governors have a good knowledge of safeguarding through your regular reports.

Pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils are clear that adults would help them if they were concerned. Through your curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out how effectively you and your leaders are improving attendance at the school. This was a concern at the time of the last inspection. Leaders have taken action to increase the celebration of good attendance. There are rewards for pupils with high levels of attendance. The focus on pupils' emotional well-being has helped address some of the reasons for poor attendance.
- Leaders have also taken strong action to challenge parents and carers to address poor attendance. The use of penalty notices and court proceeding has increased. School data shows that for families challenged in this way there has been a significant improvement in attendance. As a result of these actions attendance has improved this year. However, overall absence remains too high.
- I also wanted to know what actions you and your leaders are taking to address the high number of fixed-term exclusions at the school. The high priority you have given to developing pupils' emotional well-being is having a positive impact on improving behaviour. Staff training has improved the relationships between staff and pupils. Staff have a better understanding of each pupil's emotional needs. This has changed the way in which staff deal with disruptive behaviour and reduced the number of serious incidents. As a result, the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced substantially. This has been particularly significant because at the same time the number of pupils attending the school has increased.
- Another line of enquiry was how well prepared are pupils for the next stage of their education. There are increased opportunities for work experience. All pupils in key stage 4 participate in work experience placements. There are also opportunities for pupils to attend off-site vocational placements on a regular basis throughout the year.
- Leaders are also increasing opportunities for pupils to participate in work-related activities in the community. For example, last Christmas there was a project to source and sell one hundred Christmas trees in the local community. This helped pupils develop work-related numeracy and literacy skills. The communication skills needed to sell the trees were also developed. At the end of key stage 4, leavers are all supported to secure placements in education, training or employment. The number of pupils who do not successfully take up a placement after leaving school has reduced substantially in the last two years.

- My final line of enquiry was to look at systems in place to support pupils who may become very disruptive. You take this very seriously. Leaders address this by using thorough assessment of pupils' needs on arrival at the school. This covers personal, emotional and academic needs. Leaders use the results of these assessments to draw up individual education plans. This informs staff about each pupil's needs and how best to meet them. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of these plans and make adjustments as required. The number of incidents of serious disruption has reduced.
- When serious disruption does occur, your staff follow clear procedures. Trained staff manage disruptive pupils. Pupils have time to calm down in a safe space. If parents are not available to support their child there are clear procedures in place to manage the situation. The school now has a named police officer. In extreme cases school can contact him for support. The procedures in place are effective. They keep the pupils safe and ensure that other pupils' learning is not disrupted.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- further develop strategies to strengthen the impact of actions on reducing absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, your senior leaders, teachers, members of the local governing body and a representative from the local authority. We observed learning in classrooms and looked at pupils' work. We spoke with a group of pupils formally and other pupils informally. We scrutinised documentation from the school on a range of matters, including safeguarding and school improvement. Inspectors considered responses of staff to the Ofsted online survey. There were insufficient responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey for analysis to be possible.