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Mrs Catherine Lewis
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lewis

Short inspection of The Russett School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 2018 with Nell Banfield, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in July 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 the head of academy have high expectations and lead by example. You are assisted ably by the assured and enthusiastic leadership team. The work of the school goes from strength to strength. There is a strong sense that trustees, governors, leaders and staff never stand still in their efforts to achieve the very best outcomes for pupils.

You have created an environment of care and nurture that radiates throughout the school community. This is a school full of happy, confident and chatty pupils. Together with governors, staff, pupils, parents and carers, you are proud of being part of The Russett School. Leaders and staff break down barriers to learning, ensuring that pupils feel safe and confident to flourish, both academically and in their personal development.

Many parents are very positive about the work of the school. A typical parental comment was, 'I cannot praise the staff enough.' Parents also said that their children have made excellent progress, are happy and love coming to school. However, some parents said that communication could be better. You are aware of this minor issue and have plans to improve how the school shares information with parents.

Most staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire said that they enjoy

being part of the school team. They commented that the school is led and managed extremely well. Staff share your aspirations for pupils and wholeheartedly endorse the calm, orderly and loving culture that has been created.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve the achievement of those pupils who find it difficult to remain in their classroom throughout a session. This has been fully addressed. Staff have a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs. They use this knowledge to skilfully support and manage any behavioural issues that occur. They are quick to pick up on any restlessness or anxiety from pupils. Staff use effective ways of distracting, calming and re-engaging pupils so that little time for learning is wasted. Older pupils have learned ways to regulate their own behaviour well. This becomes clear when they step away from an activity for a short time, then re-join other pupils when they feel able to continue. These pupils make similarly good or outstanding progress as their peers.

Teaching, learning and assessment are strong. Teachers know pupils extremely well. The exceptional quality of relationships that staff have with pupils shines through in every interaction. Pupils said that they trust staff completely to care for them and to support their learning. Pupils commented that staff in the school, 'are kind' and, 'will always help if needed'. Activities planned by teachers are stimulating, fun and informative. For example, pupils enjoyed learning about staying safe when gardening. They enthusiastically offered lots of suggestions on how to use tools and equipment safely. Activities are planned carefully to meet the needs of each individual pupil. Although expectations are high for most pupils, teachers do not extend the learning of a few of the most able pupils as much as they could.

Pupils engage very positively in activities, are largely attentive and are eager to participate. They are supported well to complete their studies. Pupils' successes and achievements are celebrated regularly by both staff and pupils. Most pupils sit quietly and patiently in their class groups while the teacher explains the tasks that they are to complete. However, some pupils sit for too long, waiting for the teacher to explain what activities they and others will do. Valuable learning time is being lost and pupils begin to be distracted.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safeguarding and welfare of pupils are given high priority. You and the staff team have ensured that pupils are in a safe and secure environment. You promote the clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and reviewed regularly by leaders to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Staff and governors undertake appropriate, up-to-date training. This includes learning about keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism, child sexual exploitation and neglect.

You and the safeguarding team offer the highest standard of vigilance and support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders have extremely effective relationships with external agencies, which are instrumental in safeguarding the vulnerable pupils in your care. Pupils said that they feel very safe and cared for well. They feel confident that staff

will help them if needed. Pupils talk knowledgeably about the ways that they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. Parents said that you and the staff keep children very safe.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders meticulously collect assessment information to check the progress that pupils make. This information clearly indicates that the vast majority of pupils make outstanding progress against their targets. Staff respond quickly to any dips in the progress of individual pupils, so their learning is back on track as soon as possible. For instance, pupils who miss school for medical reasons are given extra support as soon as they return. This ensures that they catch up swiftly in their learning. By the end of key stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils are offered a personalised package of learning. This leads to awards, accreditation and qualifications, as well as providing pupils with essential experiences and skills that can help them in adult life.
- Teachers plan activities carefully to meet the needs of most pupils. However, staff do not give some of the most able pupils enough challenge in their learning.
- You offer a high-quality curriculum to pupils that is both motivating and exciting. In addition to English and mathematics, you offer pupils a rich and imaginative variety of learning experiences. This significantly contributes to developing pupils' self-belief, confidence, personal development and life skills. For example, pupils enjoyed celebrating the recent Royal wedding. They participate in a range of worthwhile experiences such as den-building, baking and trips, including to the local zoo. Pupils said that they were 'over the moon' to win first place for their raised-bed garden display at a local garden festival.
- Careers guidance is appropriate and of a high standard. Pupils and students value the step-change in responsibility they experience in key stages 4 and 5 and how well they are prepared for their future. They are offered a range of careers guidance and opportunities for career 'tasters', based on their individual needs. Staff work successfully to ensure that pupils and students benefit from a range of work experience, such as working in a garden centre, local supermarkets or café. All students in the sixth form are supported to consider their aspirations carefully. Adults are skilful at tapping into students' precise learning needs and marrying these with their individual talents and ambitions. They then plan a pathway to maximise the success of students' next steps into adult life. All students who can move on to college, do so.
- There are a wealth of strengths evident at The Russett School. The trust has a compelling strategic vision. It is very clear how the trust's desire to reach out and share expertise with other schools will add benefit to The Russett, and its pupils and staff. The local governing committee is highly effective. Its expertise, ability to challenge, and passion for the success of every pupil make an important contribution towards the strong practice that is evident in the school.
- The relationships with, and support for, parents and families are exemplary. The actions of leaders and staff demonstrate compassion and understanding of the complex feelings some families experience. Parents said that the practical help

and guidance provided by the school are seen as a lifeline to many. For example, you offer a parent and toddler session to families that have just received confirmation of their child's special educational need (SEN) and/or disability.

- You offer outreach support to schools. The mainstream primary schools find your support for them and their pupils invaluable. As well as going into schools to offer advice and guidance, you have invited schools to walk around The Russett School. Visitors observe how pupils learn. They have opportunities to see different approaches to teaching, developing communication and using resources.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the level of challenge offered to the most able pupils is consistently high across the whole school
- no learning time is wasted in the transition from group to individual work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing committee and the chair of the multi-academy trust board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with you, the head of academy and the deputy headteacher. They also met with members of the staff team who are responsible for post-16 study, careers and work-related learning. Inspectors held meetings with members of the pastoral and safeguarding team and with the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I met with three governors, including the chair of the local governing committee, and spoke by telephone with the chair of the multi-academy trust board. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. We took account of the 22 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of parents who talked with us before the school day. Inspectors reviewed the 43 responses from staff to an Ofsted questionnaire and spoke with staff during the day. Inspectors also met with two groups of pupils. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors looked at a range of school documents including: information about pupils' achievement; the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information related to the work of the governing committee and records relating to safeguarding.