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Mr Iain Sim
Principal
West Kirby Residential School
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Dear Mr Sim

Short inspection of West Kirby Residential School

Following my visit to the school on 10 February 2016 with Her Majesty's Inspector Ann Gill, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have taken up the reins of leadership seamlessly to ensure that the school's success in developing pupils' independence, self-esteem and aspirations has not been derailed. The collective vision and drive to provide a school which meets pupils' holistic needs results in pupils' exceptional progress. By the time pupils leave West Kirby Residential School they are prepared well for their life beyond school.

Every adult working at the school is a specialist in their field. Adults' understanding of pupils' specific needs is strong because of the high-quality training and ongoing support they receive. Parents agree with this view and said of staff, 'They show real understanding and value each child as an individual.' Teachers, therapists and specialist support staff make excellent use of the information they have about pupils' specific needs and ensure that all teaching is focused precisely on increasing the rate of pupils' personal and academic progress. Pupils enjoy coming to the school because they begin to understand how to work with others. Almost all pupils overcome their fear of working in groups and many reach standards beyond what was expected of them when they joined the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that the school's safeguarding arrangements are appropriate and meet current requirements. Adults working at the school use their understanding of pupils' specific needs and vulnerabilities well to ensure that their practices promote effectively pupils' well-being and safety. Training for all adults, in how to keep pupils safe, is wide ranging and matched well to the specific demands of this type of school. The school's staff induction programme ensures that all new staff are brought quickly up to speed with regard to leaders' high expectations for the safety of pupils. Additional training for staff includes areas such as online safety, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation and extremism. Governors and senior leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training. The school's own records show that a high proportion of adults have received first aid training at an appropriate level. The impact of these actions is boosted by additional professionals employed by the school, such as the medical and pastoral teams, who ensure that all staff are kept abreast of the latest guidance on pupils' welfare. Consequently, pupils feel safe and are safe in school.

The school's records, along with our discussions with pupils, show that pupils feel they are able to raise their concerns with adults. Leaders act promptly to ensure that any concerns relating to the safeguarding of pupils are passed to the appropriate bodies for further action when necessary. However, the school's safeguarding policies sometimes lack preciseness and lag behind the school's strong practices. Some individual safeguarding plans are not sharp enough, because they do not give guidance which is matched closely to pupils' specific needs, for example.

Parents' responses on the online survey, Parent View, show that parents feel their children are safe in school. Parents and pupils we spoke to feel this is the case also. However, some pupils feel that the school's approach to keeping them safe does not always support pupils' development of their independence skills well enough. Year 11 pupils said that close supervision of all pupils by staff does not allow pupils to learn from their own mistakes or to practise their social skills for themselves. This is a hindrance to the effectiveness of the school's work to ensure that pupils are able to keep themselves safe.

The minor shortfalls do not impact negatively on the safety of pupils at the school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, managers and governors have a strong vision to improve the school further. Their vision is underpinned by their accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, actions taken to build on the school's successes, since the last inspection, have been effective. For example, the development of 'The Zone' for pupils with very poor social skills and little emotional self-control ensures that this group of pupils are prepared well for their move into the main school.
- The school's work is underpinned by 'The Learning Web' which identifies the internal, external, personalised and learning environments that make up pupils' learning experience. Leaders and other adults leave no stone unturned when ensuring that pupils' specific needs are met. Parents too, acknowledge this

aspect of the school's work as the key to their child's success. One parent reported that her son 'is recognised for the person he is, not what teachers want him to be'. Consequently, pupils progress rapidly, often from extremely low starting points and being unable to access learning when they join the school, to the achievement of higher grades in academic and vocational subjects.

- Pupils at the school read well. Leaders' promotion of reading for pleasure and purpose has been effective in raising both standards and pupils' understanding of what they are reading. Year 8 pupils were observed concentrating extremely well in a 'Drop Everything And Read' session because they were captivated by the text being read to them, for example. Skilled questioning by teachers, to stretch pupils' understanding of different texts, leads to strong progress in a wide range of other contexts. For example, Year 10 pupils were questioned about their views and feelings towards drugs and gangs following their reading of a well-chosen text. These actions are also contributing positively to pupils' social, emotional, spiritual and cultural development.
- The teaching of and, as a result, pupils' application of mathematics is a strength of the school. Teachers and support staff make excellent use of their understanding of pupils' preferred style of learning to promote pupils' application of mathematical concepts in almost all subjects. Examples that we saw included, pupils' costing of items in the 'scrap yard café' during an English lesson and in another lesson working out the precise timings of their edited video clips. In a sixth form enterprise lesson, learners made effective use of scale drawings and converted imperial measurements to metric. In addition, pupils were also able to make accurate measurements of mass and temperature in their science books. As a result, pupils master mathematical skills well and a high proportion reach good-quality GCSE grades by the time they leave the school.
- The curriculum is balanced well to meet the diverse needs and interests of this group of pupils. Displays of high-quality work, particularly in art and technology but also in a good range of other subjects, bejewel the walls of classrooms and corridors. These displays demonstrate aptly the high standards reached by a significant proportion of pupils at the school. My analysis of the school's records, of pupils' outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 and when learners leave school at the end of sixth form, shows that pupils and learners benefit from a similar choice of subjects to their peers in other schools. Chinese has recently been added to the curriculum as a modern foreign language, for example.
- The behaviour of pupils, undoubtedly, remains a strength of the school. Pupils who join the school respond to strong role models of other well-behaved pupils. As a result, they begin quickly to develop their own strategies to regulate their emotions and behaviours. The school's records show that bullying is almost non-existent. Pupils spoken to said that they could not recall an incident of bullying. However, Key Stage 4 pupils astutely pointed out that on rare occasions pupils' outbursts were miss-interpreted as bullying by other pupils. Pupils benefit from ample opportunities to practise their social and behavioural skills through frequent visits into the local and wider community. For example, a group of pupils visited a local zoo as part of their science project on the day of our visit. Other pupils have visited partner schools in South Africa, China and India which is testament to the excellent progress in their personal development. Our observations of behaviour, in lessons, during meetings and at break and lunchtimes, indicate that behaviour is typically excellent.

- Pupils benefit immensely from the broad range of therapy and additional support services provided by the school. Highly focused support packages, in the form of precise interventions with pupils or training for staff in how to support pupils' specific needs, are integrated successfully into the day-to-day routine at West Kirby. As a result, pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem flourish because they are given the skills to overcome their very specific difficulties.
- The school's sixth form provides learning opportunities which meet a wide range of needs. This is reflected in the broad selection of appropriate courses provided for learners. They develop well their employability skills because they take part in work experience, realistic enterprise projects and additional learning such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Many learners attend local sixth form colleges and all receive independent careers guidance. By the time learners leave the school's sixth form, they are well on the way to becoming well-rounded young adults capable of making a significant contribution to society.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' individual safeguarding plans are sharper, so that they give guidance to adults which is matched closely to pupils' specific needs
- pupils are even more adept at keeping themselves safe, by weaving appropriate opportunities for pupils to practise and demonstrate their independence, social and self-regulation skills into the school's curriculum.

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 Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We held conversations with you and other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a range of staff, a small number of parents and several pupils and learners.
- We observed a selection of lessons across the school, some of which were observed jointly with you.
- We looked at pupils' work during our visits to classrooms.
- We observed behaviour around the school, including observing pupils at breaktimes.
- We took account of responses to surveys by pupils, parents and staff.
- We scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school.