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Mr Andrew Foord
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Foord

Short inspection of Cromwell High School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 2018 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 outstanding in October 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 have a crystal-clear vision for pupils and want them to learn as much as possible about the world and be caring and responsible citizens. Your high aspirations are shared by staff and governors. The school's motto, 'Learning today, for a better tomorrow', lies at the heart of the school's work. The school is a calm environment where every pupil is respected and valued. The school caters for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties and those with intensive autism and complex learning difficulties. You and your team have a deep knowledge of the complex needs of each pupil and work tirelessly to support them. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make excellent progress from low starting points.

Since the previous inspection, you have been made executive headteacher of Cromwell High School and Samuel Laycock School and you share your time between both schools. This means that there have been significant changes to the senior leadership structure of Cromwell High School, including appointing a head of school with whom you work very effectively.

An extensive building project has created bright and spacious learning spaces, with individual work stations, which promote pupils' learning well. The local authority

draws on your expertise as a model of outstanding practice. You work closely with other special schools in the local authority to share good practice.

You have developed a strong team of leaders and staff who are highly committed and care deeply for pupils. Staff morale is high. Staff are proud to work at the school and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities to improve their skills.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they were happy and were treated with kindness. The behaviour of pupils is exemplary both in lessons and at breaktimes. We saw lots of happy faces as we walked around the school. Pupils respond very well to the high expectations of staff. Relationships between pupils and staff are a strength of the school. Pupils are respectful to their peers and teachers. Pupils' social and personal development is supported very well. In lessons, teachers ensure that learning activities are broken down into manageable steps. They give time for pupils to respond. As a result, pupils enjoy learning, are focused and work hard.

All parents who spoke to inspectors and those who made use of the free-text service were delighted about the care and support that their children receive. One parent commented, 'My child has developed in many ways due to the dedication of this school and its staff. The headteacher and his staff listen to what you say.' Another parent said, 'My child absolutely loves it at Cromwell High School. He strongly believes that the teachers do their best to meet his needs.' Every parent who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school.

You have successfully addressed the area for improvement identified in the last inspection. Staff prepare pupils well for adulthood in a number of ways, such as one-to-one interviews, impartial careers advice and a careers day. Pupils benefit from the opportunity to participate in work experience. For example, they take part in the running of 'The Tea Room', which is part of your school. This enables them to develop their confidence and communication skills. Leaders ensure that pupils are studying the most appropriate courses. Staff work hard with external agencies to facilitate pupils' smooth transition into post-16 provision. Most pupils secure places at the local college.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a very strong culture of keeping pupils safe in school. Records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that all appropriate checks on adults are made before they start to work at the school. Staff have received up-to-date safeguarding training. Many pupils are unable to raise concerns directly or communicate their thoughts and feelings. Consequently, staff are alert in looking for changes in behaviour of pupils. Staff and governors know what to do if they have any concern about a pupil's welfare or safety. Staff work closely with parents and carers and a range of external agencies, including the local authority, health professionals and social care, to meet the needs of pupils and keep them safe. Governors routinely

check the effectiveness of safeguarding through meetings with leaders. Parents say that their children are happy and safe. Records show that bullying is very rare.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which was the progress made by pupils from their starting points. Leaders set relevant and challenging targets using information from primary schools as well as their knowledge of each pupil's needs. Leaders have recently introduced a new assessment system which aligns closely with the curriculum and measures the small steps in learning that pupils make. Leaders carefully track the progress that the pupils are making towards their targets to ensure that they make strong progress. If a pupil is not on track, additional support is provided to meet their individual needs. Leaders work effectively with staff from Samuel Laycock School and the Greater Manchester Special Schools group to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Inspection evidence shows that pupils make substantial progress from their starting points over time. However, more work is needed to refine the assessment system in order to further broaden and deepen pupils' learning.
- Leaders regularly review the curriculum to ensure that it is closely tailored to pupils' complex needs. For example, pupils have access to experiences that help them regulate their sensory needs. The curriculum enables pupils to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills including in English and mathematics. Staff use verbal reinforcements, picture recognition and technological aids well to help pupils access their learning. In the phonics lesson that we observed, pupils engaged well with the teacher and teaching assistants to practise the sounds of letters. Adults, including teaching assistants and speech language therapists, work very effectively together to promote pupils' communication skills. Pupils have many opportunities to develop independence as they move through the school.
- Leaders provide a rich variety of experiences that help pupils to learn about the world around them. For example, pupils have visits arranged to go to parks, a farm and an outdoor residential centre. Pupils also benefit from a range of enrichment opportunities such as cooking, swimming and motor vehicle maintenance. They raise money for charities.
- Leaders monitor attendance closely and quickly follow up any absences. Consequently, attendance has improved over time. Rates of attendance for most pupils are high. However, some pupils have a high level of medical need which causes them to spend periods of time in hospital. Leaders work closely with families and health professionals to ensure that pupils are well supported and can attend school regularly.
- Governors are passionate and dedicated to the school. One governor commented, 'We want our pupils to get the most out of life and fulfil their potential.' Governors bring a wealth of relevant skills and experience that enables them to challenge leaders highly effectively. Minutes of governors' meetings show that they ask leaders probing questions. Governors know how well the

school is performing because they regularly visit the school, meet with leaders and visit lessons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to refine and capture smaller steps for pupils, in order to broaden and deepen their learning further.

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

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, we met with you, the head of school, other senior leaders and teaching and support staff. I met with three members of the governing body including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited classrooms, jointly with you or your head of school, to observe and engage with pupils about their learning. We met with a group of pupils from across the school. We scrutinised pupils' work to evaluate pupils' learning over time. We spoke with four parents and took account of 11 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including nine free-text responses. We also considered the views of 15 staff.

We looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, external reviews and information about pupils' progress. We also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe; records of training; safeguarding checks and attendance and behaviour information. I also undertook a review of the school's website.