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Dr John Patterson  
Principal  
St Vincent's School – A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs  
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Dear Dr Patterson

### **Short inspection of St Vincent's School – A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs**

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 2016 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 June 2012.

#### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as principal in 2013, you have instilled a clear vision which is followed and understood by governors and staff. Pupils' learning is enriched with a wide range of opportunities for them to engage with the local community, including with business and enterprise. This helps to deliver your aim for pupils to achieve success in adulthood once their journey at St Vincent's comes to an end. There are many examples of past pupils following their chosen careers as a result of your work in this area.

There is an ambitious culture at St Vincent's which pervades the whole school. Staff have high expectations for pupils to achieve their well-established goals. Staff are experts in providing just enough support for pupils to be successful. This helps pupils to become independent and to share responsibility for their own development. The school is an exceptionally harmonious place for learning with a distinctive, warm and caring ethos. Staff are proud to work at the school and pupils enjoy their time here. As one pupil told me, 'This is the best school in the world.'

At your previous inspection, the lead inspector reported that further developments were needed in meeting individual pupils' needs across the curriculum. It was also reported that subject leaders should ensure that teachers observe other teachers so that standards could be monitored more effectively and that best practice could be

shared. Our observations showed that you have achieved these improvements. Pupils complete tasks in lessons which are well matched to their individual needs and allow them to make strong progress. Teachers, including those new to the school, also talked about the high-quality support they receive, including watching more experienced teachers in action.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose; records are detailed and of high quality. There is vigilance around safeguarding across the school. Senior leaders meet regularly to discuss safeguarding matters to ensure that they remain aware of any developing issues. Governors responsible for safeguarding conduct regular checks to keep abreast of any issues and to check that procedures are being adhered to. When rare incidents occur, staff make detailed notes and these are shared with leaders. Records indicate that any concerns are followed up swiftly and are dealt with thoroughly. Pupils learn how to stay safe when using the internet. Appropriate checks are completed on all staff when they are appointed to work at the school.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training. They also receive specific training to support the additional needs of pupils at St Vincent's. It is clear that staff know individual pupils very well and this is an important factor in ensuring that pupils' welfare needs are fully catered for. All pupils spoken to reported that they feel safe in school and well supported. A minority of parents reported that pupils did not always feel safe in school, but inspectors found no evidence to support this view.

### **Inspection findings**

- Since you were appointed as principal, you have wasted no time in sharing your vision of achieving the very best outcomes for pupils at St Vincent's. You have made it your business to develop pupils' strengths within the national curriculum but also in the wider curriculum. Pupils have excellent opportunities to become involved with the local community, including with business and enterprise. They have opportunities to become leaders, for example within the local scout group, during Duke of Edinburgh's Award activities and when visiting local schools to conduct assemblies. The collective opportunities provided for pupils significantly enhance their chances of success in adult life, for example by securing employment in careers matching their areas of interest. Case studies confirm the success of your approach, along with external accreditations and awards. A clear example of this is the admission of St Vincent's to the freedom of the city of Liverpool in recognition of the impact of your work.
- Teaching is characterised by very strong and supportive relationships between pupils and also between pupils and staff. Staff have consistently high expectations of pupils and guide them expertly towards their clear targets. The use of questioning is impressive and allows staff to assess what pupils already know and then lead them to new learning.
- Individual pupils are known extremely well and, as a result, pupils are

provided with tasks which are well matched to their abilities. Detailed information outlining individual pupils' needs is made available for new staff so they know how pupils are best supported. This helps to ensure that pupils' needs are continually met. A recently introduced assessment system has provided further support in meeting pupils' individual needs across the curriculum. Teachers know where pupils have fully understood and where they still need support. This information helps teachers to plan tasks which address any gaps in learning.

- Pupils make outstanding progress from their different starting points. In discussions, pupils demonstrated their impressive knowledge of subjects across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils talked confidently about the different oceans and continents of the world while others could describe what it would be like to live in Stone-Age Britain. Assessment information demonstrates that the vast majority of pupils make rapid and sustained progress and this was mirrored by the progress observed during lessons. The very few pupils who are disadvantaged also make strong progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum at St Vincent's is a key strength. Pupils learn a wide variety of subjects but their learning is developed exceptionally well through enrichment activities. Such activities provide pupils with opportunities to make new friendships, to follow their dreams and to be confident of a successful future. You help pupils to overcome barriers created by their sight impairments and to have confidence about their futures. As one proud parent reported, 'His passion in life is sport and he didn't know if he could still do all of his sports when his sight went. The school has given him the help and belief that he can compete in sport. The school has opened doors for his future which has helped me to see a light at the end of the tunnel.'
- Pupils enjoy their time at St Vincent's and are proud to be part of the school. They are confident, happy and are eager to talk about their experiences. They recognise and are thankful for the excellent support and opportunities with which they are provided. Pupils talk with confidence about what they would like to do in the future, such as studying performing arts, playing in a band and setting up a gaming business. They also appreciate the support given in helping to prepare them for a successful and independent adulthood, including learning skills for independent living.
- Your systems to promote regular attendance are effective. Overall attendance improved in 2015 and compared very favourably to other special schools. Additionally, the number of pupils who were persistently absent also reduced to below the national average. Staff are well informed of any medical appointments or other reasons for pupils' absence and are quick to react if pupils are absent from school.
- There is a hive of exciting plans and activities at St Vincent's. You are constantly searching and striving for improvement. We discussed how it would be helpful to clarify your key priorities more systematically. This would help all staff and leaders to understand which projects are most relevant and how everyone can contribute. It would also help governors to assess your success along the journey of improvement. In addition, a small number of parents felt that they are not always informed of changes or did

not fully understand the progress their children were making. We discussed how you should further strengthen your communication with parents so that they fully appreciate the impressive work going on and the impact it is having on their children.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement planning provides leaders and staff with a clearer view of key priorities, how they will be achieved and what success will look like
- parents are fully informed and appreciate any changes made to the provision and understand more clearly what you are trying to achieve.

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

Ian Hardman  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher, head of care, designated safeguarding leader and a group of teachers. We also met with the chair of the governing body and the school improvement partner. We spoke with two parents and considered the response of 11 parents from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We visited all classrooms, including four jointly with yourself and the deputy headteacher, to observe and speak with pupils about their learning. I also scrutinised pupils' work from a range of subjects which had been recorded on different media. We met with a group of six pupils from across the school and spoke informally with several pupils during breaktimes.

We considered a wide range of documentation relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, attendance information, governance, monitoring and evaluation, assessment and safeguarding.

Several lines of enquiry were pursued on inspection. These included:

- whether standards had been maintained since your appointment
- how teachers use assessment information to closely match tasks to pupils' abilities
- whether all pupils make strong enough progress from their starting points

- the strength of pupils' wider outcomes, such as their preparation for a successful adulthood
- how effective the curriculum is in meeting the needs of all pupils
- what strategies are in place to promote regular attendance
- whether safeguarding is effective.