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Mr Andrew Hodkinson
Principal
West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College
Westwood Way
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Dear Mr Hodkinson

Short inspection of West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 2017 with Peter McKenzie, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection despite the challenges you have faced. For example, the primary needs of a large number of your current pupils have changed from social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) to autism (ASD). You and the leadership team have also very successfully established a second base for your school 10 miles from your current location. From the outset you have ensured that the very high expectations you have for both pupils' achievement and behaviour have been maintained on both sites.

Your focused approach to making the school even better was apparent from the outset of the inspection. The very clear role leaders at all levels play in bringing about improvement to the quality of teaching and learning has continued to enhance outcomes for pupils across the school.

You and your leadership team know your school exceptionally well. Your clear understanding of the differing needs of each pupil in your care has enabled you to ensure that provision matches the needs of individual pupils very closely. As a result, pupils make excellent progress overall.

You and your leadership team are passionate about supporting the needs and increasing the life choices of all pupils in school. This is clearly demonstrated

through the work undertaken by the 'WeCanDo.Co' scheme. Pupils from the school produce innovative and well-made items such as personalised mugs, coasters and shopping bags which are then sold in the local library and beyond. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were exceptionally proud that their customers included the local primary school and a group from Sierra Leone. They were also proud to describe how the link with the local library has increased their opportunities to learn new skills, including how to catalogue books.

Staff are exceptionally good at identifying the needs of pupils and matching learning to ensure pupils make the maximum progress. As a result pupils across the school make very strong progress in all areas of the curriculum. Disadvantaged pupils make better progress than others in the school and those nationally. This is because of the highly effective way you deploy pupil premium funding to support the needs of pupils.

The most able pupils in key stages 3 and 4 and some post-16 students often transfer to provision within Boston Spa High School. This enables pupils to experience high school and develops opportunities for pupils to socialise with peers at break and lunchtimes. Pupils who attend were keen to tell inspectors how proud they are to wear their high school uniforms and how much they enjoyed coming to school. The most able pupils have in the past joined classes in drama, music, physical education and art. This year one pupil has joined a GCSE mathematics class and is making exceptionally good progress. You and other members of the senior leadership team recognise that this inclusive practice enables the most able pupils to reach the higher levels of achievement of which they are capable. However, you also realise that more work needs to be done to improve opportunities for pupils to join their peers in a wider range of curriculum areas.

As a leadership team you have embraced the challenge of setting up Woodhouse learning, a new inner city site with a focus on pupils with ASD, which includes a primary and early years unit. Your enthusiasm and attention to detail have ensured that the standards reached by pupils at this new provision are equal to those at the Boston Spa site. The well-run and high-quality early years provision ensures that children make an excellent start in an environment where their complex needs are well understood.

Parents spoken to during the inspection and those that left comments via Ofsted's text service were almost unanimous in their view that the school offers their children an excellent standard of education. Parents' praise for staff and leaders was particularly noteworthy, and the views of one parent summed up the feelings of others well with the comment: 'This school has given my child back his self-esteem and self-worth. He loves coming to school every day and can't wait to get into the car. When he first came he was withdrawn and would not communicate, now he talks regularly and happily to staff and strangers.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is given a very high priority within school. New staff confirm it is a key element in the school's induction process. Senior leaders regularly attend multidisciplinary team meetings and work closely with other professionals to ensure pupils are kept safe and secure.

Staff spoken to during the inspection describe safeguarding as the 'golden thread which is woven into all that we do'. The training they undertake is comprehensive and regularly updated, which ensures staff clearly understand current requirements.

- Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of record-keeping are robust and effective. The school liaises well with outside agencies when the school needs additional support to help vulnerable pupils. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure safety. You have ensured that all arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and are of an appropriately high quality.

Standards of safeguarding provision are equally strong for children who attend the early years provision and students that attend post-16. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure when they come to school and learn how to stay safe in life outside school.

Inspection findings

- As part of the work I undertook before arriving at school I reviewed the previous inspection report. I noted that you had been asked to extend the excellent practice already in place for checking pupils' progress in mathematics, English and science to other areas of the curriculum. I held discussions with the heads of school on both sites and with staff. It quickly became apparent that current systems measure the excellent progress pupils make across the curriculum and are understood and used by all staff.
- I noted from data available to me before the beginning of the inspection that although pupils' attendance last year was higher than the national average for similar schools, the overall attendance of boys was lower than that of girls. I also noted that disadvantaged pupils were more regularly absent than those pupils not supported by extra funding. It quickly became apparent that you were aware of this and this year have put in place effective systems to improve attendance overall. For example, you have now employed a family support worker who works closely with families, offering support and guidance. This, alongside other measures, has increased attendance to above the national average and has reduced the number of pupils whose attendance is a concern to a very small group.
- Staff in classrooms across both sites work exceptionally closely together as a team. Observations in classrooms showed the effectiveness of partnerships between support staff and teachers particularly well. Such was the high quality of the work undertaken by support staff, particularly their skills around asking questions, that it was often difficult to ascertain which member of staff was the teacher.

- A clear focus for the inspection was the progress of the most able pupils. In the work I had undertaken before the inspection I noted that while the school website gave a good account of the wide range of qualifications and accreditations obtained by pupils last year, there was little mention of those that obtained higher level qualifications. Initial discussions with you and the heads of school showed that you closely monitor the work of the most able pupils as a group. The data you provided clearly showed that they make equally strong progress to other groups across the school. However, you are also aware that currently there is not sufficient opportunity for the older most able pupils to undertake a wide range of higher level qualifications, particularly those who attend Boston Spa High School.
- The governing body is highly supportive of all that you do but is also unafraid to challenge you as leaders. Governors are very regular visitors to the school and as a result know the school very well. They demonstrate a strong understanding of their statutory duties and are passionate about keeping pupils safe both inside and outside school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The most able pupils who attend the school's provision at Boston Spa High School are given more opportunity to study a wider range of qualifications and accreditations in order that they may achieve to their full potential.

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

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection the inspection team held meetings with you, the heads of school, middle leaders, school staff and three members of the governing body. Inspectors met informally with nine parents and carers at the beginning of the school day and spoke with pupils both inside and outside the classroom. The inspection team scrutinised a range of documents including safeguarding documents, behaviour and attendance files and the school's system for measuring pupils' progress. They also took into account the views of 35 members of staff who completed an online questionnaire.