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Ms Carol Barker
Head of School
Woodlands Special School
Beechdale Road
Aspley
Nottingham
NG8 3EZ

Dear Ms Barker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlands Special School

Following my visit to your school on 21 September 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are continuing to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified during the section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive headteacher and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on a tour of all the classrooms and facilities. I met with key staff in relation to behaviour, attendance and outcomes for pupils. A conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body took place over the telephone. Three pupils took me on a tour of the school during which they spoke to me about their experience of being a pupil at Woodlands Special School. The school improvement plan, summary information about the progress of pupils and records of staff suitability checks were evaluated.

Main findings

Following the last monitoring inspection in May 2014, you have continued to motivate the staff team to strive for the very best outcomes for pupils. The staff I spoke to during the inspection told me that the school is improving and that everyone always tries to find solutions to challenging situations. You work well with the executive headteacher to create a culture where staff are motivated to further improve their skills and knowledge.

The Chair of the Governing Body demonstrates a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. Through regular meetings, the governing body is now more effective in holding senior leaders to account for how well pupils are achieving. There are regular visits from members of the governing body to observe the work of the school and they use this information to aid their decisions about the next steps for improvement.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the systems for collecting and analysing information about the behaviour of pupils continue to improve. The lead member of staff for pupil behaviour is relentless in her pursuit of solutions to help pupils manage any negative behaviours. Leaders use the information they collect about behaviour to make effective decisions. This results in pupils being better supported by staff in classrooms and during small group sessions.

You are aware that the attendance of pupils needs to improve further. The attendance officer, who is employed by the federation, works with local authority agencies to promote attendance across both schools. There is effective liaison with children's homes in order to promote attendance for these pupils. Penalty notices are issued to parents where appropriate. I was shown some information that demonstrates that, compared with this time last year, there has been an increase in the attendance of pupils.

The quality of teaching has continued to improve and you now believe this to be good in most areas of the school. Teachers now plan their lessons based on up-to-date assessment information. You have invested in the school environment to help motivate the pupils to engage with their learning. The pupils spoke to me with enthusiasm about using the green screen technology for film making. You tour the school twice each day and conduct a formal learning walk once a week. The information you collect during these times helps you to support all staff to further improve the quality of teaching.

You have effective systems in place to regularly assess the progress pupils are making in all subjects. Representatives of the teaching staff told me that every six weeks the progress of pupils is checked. Where there is any indication of a pupil not doing as well as they should, an individual support plan is put in place. Your analysis of how much progress pupils made during the last academic year demonstrates that some pupils did not make the progress expected of them in English and

mathematics. You have plans in place to address this, including ensuring that all staff are clear about the school's assessment policy requirements. This will ensure that the checks that teachers undertake to assess pupils' starting points are more robust. This will allow you to be confident in your judgement about the overall progress that pupils make during their time at your school.

Your improvement plan continues to drive your work in school. Following the last monitoring inspection in May 2014, you have refined the plan further to include sharper timescales. You recognise the school website needs further improvement and that it should contain the special educational needs information report.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school benefits from the considerable experience and determination of the executive headteacher, who is also a national leader of education.

The local authority provides a link officer to challenge and support the work of the school. Over recent months, she has not been able to visit the school as regularly as she would have liked, but she now has a plan in place to do so in the near future. The school has benefited from visits by local authority officers to moderate the school's judgements about the attainment of pupils in English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham.

Yours sincerely

Phil Harrison
Her Majesty's Inspector