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15 December 2016

Ms Fiona Woolford
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Dear Ms Woolford

Short inspection of Beaufort School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2016 with Rowena Green, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Beaufort School is a welcoming and positive learning community that serves the needs of pupils with severe, profound and complex learning needs extremely well. Inspectors could see from the smiles on their faces and the warm greetings that awaited them how enthusiastic pupils were when arriving at school in the morning. I spoke to some parents before one of the regular parent workshops you hold and they paid tribute to the way leaders and staff care for and value their children. Responses from parents and carers following the many questionnaires and surveys leaders prepare show high levels of satisfaction. The school serves its pupils and families extremely well.

The school continues to work closely and effectively with its co-located primary school, offering Beaufort pupils opportunities to integrate with mainstream pupils. This is of enormous benefit to the pupils and an excellent example of a cohesive and inclusive community of two schools sharing expertise and resources. As you know, the previous inspection highlighted the need to focus on the achievement of the more able pupils. You have succeeded in addressing this by offering pupils who have a range of learning difficulties or those on the autistic spectrum more opportunities to access mainstream education and achieve higher standards. Some of these pupils are now close to reaching age-related standards in reading, language and number, showing the excellent progress they are making.

At the time of the previous inspection, the hard federation with the partner special school had just been established. A great deal has been achieved since then to build on this partnership. Leaders and governors have also expanded provision further by admitting more pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Since the previous inspection, pupil numbers have grown both in the early years and across the school.

Early years provision remains outstanding. Children thrive in stimulating indoor and outdoor areas. Nursery- and Reception-aged children with profound and multiple learning difficulties are very well cared for, as well as challenged, by highly skilled and well-qualified staff. Another aspect that has improved very well is the way children in the early years and pupils across the school develop independence. This too was part of the area for improvement highlighted at the time of the previous inspection.

The effective use of communication aids, such as pictorial cards and signing, enables pupils and young children in the early years and pupils across the school to make choices and engage with adults and other pupils. However, there is still more to be done in some groups to help pupils with complex learning needs, such as those on the autistic spectrum, to be more engaged, as well as being helped to talk and listen to adults and other pupils. In most groups, teachers and support staff make very good use of activities and resources, such as touch-pads, computer tablets and soft-play equipment, to improve pupils' communication and language skills. There is scope to extend this good practice to all groups, particularly focusing on pupils who have the potential, but not yet the skills or confidence, to communicate with others.

You, the two heads of school and the early years strategic leader provide highly skilled and effective leadership. Leaders, staff and governors work closely across the federation to share best practice. Peer mentors support, coach and train new staff and monitor their professional development very well. In addition, productive professional cooperation, training and staff development are fostered effectively through the partnership established with a local university in the local learning trust for excellence. This provides further opportunities for staff to develop and improve their expertise. I can see why the chair of the governing body told me, 'We never stand still', reflecting leaders' and governors' aspirations for continuous and sustained improvement.

Leaders monitor pupils' work and progress diligently. They are refining assessments further to measure the small steps pupils make to calibrate progress and set individualised targets in, what are termed, 'routes for learning'. Senior leaders take a strong lead in helping to improve teaching and assessment. Leaders' evaluations of teaching and learning are accurate and make sure that regular and systematic monitoring helps them to identify the right priorities for sustained improvement. They have rightly identified the need to focus now on improving pupils' communication and language skills. You and the governors appointed speech therapists for blocks of time each term as part of this priority and these are having an impact.

Leaders and staff plan an exciting range of activities, topics and events that stimulate and excite pupils. Some stunning, what your staff call, 'wow' activities

include the effective use of the hydrotherapy pool and sensory areas. For example, the staff created 'icebergs' with pupils in the hydrotherapy pool to touch and explore, which stimulate language and facial expressions that communicate how pupils feel. This is particularly effective for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties. The staff created a simulation of a 'Victorian mine' in one of the soft-play areas to help pupils learn about different periods in history. Pupils thoroughly enjoy events such as the art week production where they made and played musical instruments and wore costumes. Music and drama performances are organised so that pupils learn to perform and communicate with an audience, including parents and pupils from many visiting schools. These, and many more examples, illustrate how teachers and support staff carefully devise a range of tactile activities, events and interesting topics for pupils to engage in that stimulate and improve their learning and achievement. There are plans to extend outdoor areas to include the use of woodland spaces for pupils to enjoy and study.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding and staff vetting procedures are robust and fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant, reflecting an effective culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Governors and staff keep up to date with training and carry out thorough risk assessments of indoor and outdoor activities and resources. The morning and after-school arrangements for transporting pupils to and from school in one of seven buses are very well organised. Every adult and member of staff, including drivers and escorts, carry out their responsibilities carefully, respecting pupils' dignity throughout. Leaders, governors and staff comply fully with the requirement to complete training as part of the government's 'Prevent' duty. You and the staff team are fully informed and understand the issues related to the risks that pupils and families may be exposed to, such as racism, bigotry or radicalisation. Children in the early years settings are very safe and secure, for example when using outdoor areas such as woodlands, gardens, activity areas and climbing frames. Leaders regularly survey parents and carers and consult with them to make sure that the school is fully informed and up to date with any changes to pupils' medical or physical needs. Parents are very happy with their children's safety and well-being.

Inspection findings

- The professional partnerships with the federated special school, the co-located mainstream primary school and the learning trust for excellence make a strong contribution to the school's outstanding provision. These partnerships enable leaders, governors and staff to continually seek improvement by sharing and disseminating best practice.
- The staff team are very committed to sustained improvement. As the chair of the governing body told me, 'We are all passionate about special educational needs provision. Staff and governors never stand still and we have a clear vision.' Leaders are visionary and innovative in their approach to special educational needs provision.

- The major school developments that have been set out in the development plan identify further priorities for sustained improvement. One of these, rightly, sets out the actions needed to improve teaching further and the support provided for pupils to develop their communication and language skills.
- Leaders are correct in identifying, as inspectors have, that the most effective practice is not being replicated in a small number of pupil focus groups. There is scope for further improvement here to ensure that pupils with complex learning needs or on the autistic spectrum are stimulated and engage with others. A small number of pupils become frustrated, disengage or withdraw from the intended or planned activity if intervention and support is not timely or effective.
- Assessments show that most pupils, including those that are disadvantaged, make rapid progress from their starting points. Nearly all groups of pupils and children in the early years achieve very well. Pupils' progress is evident year by year and over their time at the school.
- There has been good progress since the school's previous inspection in 2012. Leaders, staff and governors are passionate about securing the best outcomes for pupils by helping teachers to become successful practitioners. There are excellent opportunities for staff to work together and share highly effective or outstanding practice across both schools in the federation.
- The extended use of outdoor areas, including woodland walks, visits to the theatre, library or swimming pool provide wonderful experiences for pupils and young children in the early years. Leaders and staff make a strong contribution to pupils' welfare and personal development, as well as to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The extended use of classrooms and increased access to speech and language provision are very effective. There is a wealth of stimulating resources. Climbing frames, a trampoline in the early years and technology such as touch screens, tablets and sensory light simulators engage pupils in tactile activities. For many pupils, particularly those with profound learning difficulties or severe physical disabilities, these provide opportunities for them to communicate with and respond to adults and their peers.
- Some pupils attend lessons at the co-located mainstream primary school, for example physical education and mathematics lessons. This is both inclusive and helpful for both mainstream and Beaufort pupils. The staff go the extra mile to provide further off-site experiences, such as attending special cooking classes at the 'Birmingham City kitchen'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to focus on improving some of the teaching and support provided to develop the language and communication skills of pupils who have complex learning needs or are on the autistic spectrum.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and the two heads of school across the federation. I also held a meeting with six governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Inspectors visited lessons in all classrooms and the early years with the heads of school and the federation's early years strategic leader. We looked at pupils' work in books and records of their progress and achievements. My colleague and I spoke to pupils during lessons and observed them arriving at school in the morning on one of seven buses that transport them from home to school. I considered the views of parents and carers responding to the most recent school surveys as there were too few to analyse from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I held a telephone conversation with a consultant school improvement adviser to speak about the outcomes following any recent support and monitoring that she had undertaken. I looked at the school's most recent assessment information about pupils' learning and progress across the school. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and school development plan, as well as checking staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

During this short inspection I tested four lines of enquiry:

- the achievement of pupils who are on the autistic spectrum
- the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and how well leaders and staff track the progress and performance of pupils across the school
- the extent to which leaders have improved teaching and assessment since the previous inspection and how well teachers and support staff help pupils to become more independent
- the safety and well-being of pupils and the school's safeguarding procedures.