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8 December 2013

Mr J Hamp  
Acting Principal  
Springfields Academy  
Curzon Street  
Calne  
Wiltshire  
SN11 0DS

Dear Mr Hamp

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Springfields School**

Following my visit with Sharon Lewis and David Kidner, Social Care Inspectors, to your academy on 4 and 5 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and leadership and management at the academy. At the same time, there was an inspection of residential provision under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The focus of this monitoring visit was to check progress since the previous monitoring inspection in October 2013.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We met with you and other senior leaders of the school and the residential provision, the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, staff and students. Telephone conversations were held with the local authority designated officer (LADO) and a representative of the Education Funding Agency. A number of visits were made to the classrooms and the residential provision. Behaviour was observed at mealtimes and break times.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy's safeguarding arrangements do not meet requirements.

The quality of leadership and management requires improvement.

### **Context**

The academy's roll is currently 97 students. Almost all students board in one of the academy's four houses during the teaching week. All have a statement of special educational needs, primarily for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or for autistic spectrum disorder. There has been a marked increase in the proportion of students who have autistic spectrum disorder. These students now represent more than half of the academy's roll, a small number of whom have complex and challenging needs. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is above average. This is government funding which the academy receives for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are in local authority care and the children of armed service personnel. You have been acting Principal since 7 October 2013.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school. Students told inspectors that they feel safe. In lessons observed students' attitudes to learning were positive. Students want to learn and complete the work set. They listen to the staff and readily respond to their questioning and guidance. Students work successfully in small groups and individually. Expectations are clear and staff are confident and skilled in ensuring that lessons proceed at a good pace and individual students are supported to learn well. Mealtimes are sociable and pleasant. Visible supervision at break times and when students go to different lessons means that any potential incidents are quickly defused. In the residential provision warm and positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident. The school is successful in helping the students develop the skills that enable them to be independent and to manage their own behaviour better. As a result, they are learning to reflect and develop as citizens.

Since the previous monitoring visit the management of challenging behaviour has improved. Incidents are more consistently and thoroughly recorded. There are now appropriate records of physical interventions that include the staff involved, holds used and debriefings after the incident. Parents and carers are contacted. From records scrutinised, all staff who have been involved in physical intervention since the last inspection visit have received accredited training. There has been a significant reduction in the frequency of physical intervention recently. Follow-up action is not yet recorded consistently to ensure that the school learns from the

incidents to consider whether the student's behaviour should be managed differently.

Information on incidents is now appropriately assembled and monitored for trends and patterns and this is already leading to direct action by the senior leadership team such as increasing staffing at certain times. However, precise evaluation is limited and has not yet been presented to governors, thus reducing its effectiveness.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

It is clear that the leaders of the school took the findings of the recent Ofsted monitoring visit very seriously and improvements are evident. Two of the three national minimum standards for residential schools identified at the visit as not fully met are now met.

The rigour with which behaviour is managed and scrutinised has improved. The 'allegation against staff' policy has been reviewed and now describes the appropriate steps that will be taken in the event of a serious allegation. The admissions policy is currently under review. The school is working with the local authority to clarify criteria for admission to the school. Staff have been consulted on the type of special educational needs they feel most confident in working with. There is now a clearer admissions procedure that is being followed and good examples of work taking place before students are admitted. This leads to a better understanding of the student and the provision that is needed to meet their needs. Teachers, residential staff, parents and carers and the student consider progress in meetings following admission. These discussions lead to any further issues being identified.

The school does not fully meet safeguarding requirements. The school's procedures that describe the actions that must be taken by senior staff following a disclosure are not clear enough. They are not in line with local area expectations. This potentially puts students at risk. All staff have the necessary checks prior to appointment to ensure that they are eligible to work with children. Staff receive appropriate training in child protection.

The hard work and willingness of senior leaders, staff and governors means that the school is running efficiently on a daily basis. Governors know the school well. They make on-going contributions to action planning and regular visits to classrooms. However, there is a current lack of sharpness in their monitoring and evaluation. The school action plan covers many of the areas the school needs to address but the lack of clarity about the short-, medium- and longer-term priorities with clear milestones and success criteria means that governors are not holding senior leaders to account sufficiently.

The school is entering a period of significant change as its new building nears completion and important decisions are required about the curriculum, admissions, staffing and future ways in which behaviour will be managed. Governors are not

currently providing the strategic direction of the school well enough. Nor are they holding the current senior leadership to account through effective performance management arrangements. Morale among the vast majority of staff is good because senior leaders have sought to engage and involve them, although it is not universally positive. Springfields faces an uncertain future because there is lack of clarity and unresolved decisions about strategic and senior leadership. This means that the school's capacity to improve further and ensure the on-going quality of teaching and learning is weakened.

### **External support**

Since the last visit the school has been in close contact with the Education Funding Agency which has given effective support in relation to the action plan. It is intended that an education adviser will be allocated to the school and this will be important to check the on-going progress of the school.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school by reviewing the safeguarding procedures, particularly in relation to disclosure and the actions to be taken. (NMS 11)
- Resolve the remaining issues relating to the admission policy and the management and monitoring of students' behaviour.
- Commission an external review of governance to ensure that the governing body has the necessary structures, skills and knowledge to set the future strategic direction and hold the school rigorously to account for short- and longer-term developments.
- Clarify the role, responsibilities and accountabilities of senior leaders, in particular those of the acting principal.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**