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Janet Collins
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mrs Collins

Short inspection of Springfield House Community Special School

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 2015 with Andrew Orgill, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. School leaders and governors are ambitious for the school and keen to raise standards still further.

Since the last inspection, you have provided support to Lindsworth School, a residential special school. This arrangement has been formalised and both schools are now federated. You are the executive headteacher and there is one governing body to oversee the work of both schools. However, you and the governors have not taken your eyes off the ball regarding Springfield House. Governors have ensured that the capacity of the leadership team at Springfield is maintained by increasing the number of school leaders and by providing them with appropriate training and support. The checks on the work of the school are frequent and rigorous, and the findings communicated to governors. You have an excellent knowledge of the strengths of individual teachers and support staff, and you know your pupils well. As a result, Springfield House continues to provide an outstanding education for its pupils while at the same time providing effective support to Lindsworth School.

The number of pupils at the school is increasing, especially in Years 1 and 2. As a result, you and your staff have developed the provision for pupils at Key Stage 1. This has included the opening of the new 'Key Stage 1 Centre' which provides a range of excellent facilities and resources to support pupils' social, emotional and

academic development.

A strong sense of care and nurture permeates the life of the school. The well-being of pupils is central to your vision. You are well supported by leaders, staff and governors in realising your aim of 'Making a difference together'. The thoughtfulness given to pupils' social and emotional development underpins the clear improvements in pupils' behaviour and attendance. As a result, pupils enjoy school, engage positively in their learning and quickly improve their knowledge, skills and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics. Your approach to improving pupils' reading skills provides a good example of your determination to raise standards still further. With your staff, you have introduced a commercial reading and testing scheme that has ensured that pupils achieve well in reading.

The leadership team have put in place robust procedures to increase pupils' attendance and to reduce persistent absence, having 15% or more absences from school. As a result, pupils' attendance rates have risen since the last inspection, but are still not above average.

The last inspection found that, on occasion, the work for higher-ability pupils was too easy. Since then, you have made sure that teachers and support staff provide work for the most-able pupils that deepens their understanding, particularly in reading and writing. However, pupils' work shows that there is further to go in developing pupils' ability to reason, problem-solve and apply their knowledge and understanding in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding at the school is underpinned by detailed checks on risks, procedures, policy and training, leading to a culture of vigilance, identification of risk and support for those most in need. All staff have been appropriately trained in child protection and safeguarding issues, including sessions on how to recognise the possible warning signs that pupils may be at risk of radicalisation. As a result, all staff fully understand their safeguarding duties. Governors have a good grasp of their duty to safeguard children and receive regular reports from the school's leaders, including from the designated teacher for looked after children.

A number of leaders and governors have completed safer recruitment training. As a result, the checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough and rigorous. For example, any gaps in a person's employment or education history are systematically checked during the recruitment process.

You and your staff deliver an exciting curriculum to help pupils fully understand the risks and dangers associated with, for example, fire, roads, water, knives, stranger danger and the use of social media and mobile phones. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that any bullying issues are quickly and effectively resolved.

The leadership team has made sure that all safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements and are fit for purpose. Record keeping is suitably detailed

and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's overall performance. As the school increases in size, you are ambitious to build on its current successes in order to secure further improvements. The impact of initiatives and the work of the school are frequently and effectively monitored. Leaders at all levels check the progress of all groups of pupils across the school. Governors assiduously check, challenge and support the work of school leaders.
- From their very low starting points, pupils make rapid improvements in their reading, writing and mathematics. Phonics (the link between letters and sounds) teaching is highly effective and helps pupils improve their reading and writing skills. Many pupils enter the school with speech and language skills that are below those typical for their age. You have employed a speech and language specialist to provide support for these pupils. Information provided by the school shows that pupils' speaking skills have rapidly improved as a result. Since the previous inspection, the school has been re-awarded the 'Basic Skills Quality Mark'. This is an externally verified award that seeks to recognise the school's effective provision for improving standards in literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. For example, all of the pupils who left the school at the end of Year 6 have remained in the secondary placement to which they transferred. In addition, an increasing number of pupils are successfully transferring to mainstream education.
- You have rightly identified that pupils' writing skills are not always applied consistently. As a result, the leadership team have sought ways to improve pupils' writing by increasing opportunities for them to use their writing skills in other subjects, for example history and geography. However, pupils' work shows that there is further to go in developing pupils' writing in topic work. You have also rightly identified that the most-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to use and apply their mathematical skills.
- You and the governors have made sure that the federation with Lindsworth School has not had a negative effect on Springfield House. You have increased the size of the leadership team and provided appropriate support and training to develop their leadership skills.
- Appropriate staff training and support, including child protection, Prevent and safeguarding guidance, has been provided. Staff who spoke with inspectors said that they felt that their careers were 'invested in' and that they were improving their knowledge, skills and understanding specific to their role.
- You and the governors have made sure that the pupil premium funding is used to provide a wide variety of support for eligible pupils. The impact of this is that the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the school are closing.
- Governors have a secure understanding of how effectively the sports funding is used. An increased number of pupils take part in sporting

activities and the school's football team has achieved notable successes in various competitions.

- All staff consistently model appropriate behaviour, language and speaking skills. Pupils' conduct, attitudes to learning and social skills quickly improve when they join the school. All staff deal with inappropriate behaviour calmly, efficiently and effectively. Disruptions to learning are kept to a minimum as all staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy. As a result, despite their social, emotional and mental health needs, the vast majority of pupils are consistently polite, thoughtful and courteous. The number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped since the previous inspection. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last 10 years.
- You are proactive in contacting parents to support pupils with low attendance as soon as difficulties arise. You also use a range of outside agencies to support pupils and their families. As a result of the school's effective actions, pupils' attendance has improved but is still below national averages for mainstream schools.
- Effective teaching was observed in all classes and the work in pupils' books shows that pupils are doing well. Teachers and support staff use the information they have about what pupils know and can do to plan appropriate learning activities that meet the needs of most pupils. Support staff make an exceptional contribution to pupils' learning. When entering classes it is not always possible to identify who is the teacher or who is the support staff. This is because all staff are actively involved in checking pupils' understanding and modifying the work as appropriate. As at the previous inspection, residential care staff make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning, behaviour management and social and emotional development.
- The school actively promotes British values through the school's broad and varied curriculum. Pupils show tolerance and respect, demonstrating the strong impact of the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. For example, pupils have opportunities to learn a modern foreign language at Key Stages 1 and 2. They are also able to learn about different religions, faiths and cultures in religious education and take part in a wide range of trips and visits.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- All pupils, particularly the most able, have opportunities to reason mathematically and to demonstrate their ability to use and apply their mathematical skills through problem solving.
- Pupils' writing skills are consistently developed in all subjects.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with that of mainstream schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one day inspection, inspectors were able to discuss the work of the school with you, your leadership team and other staff. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classes across the school. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. Inspectors also spoke informally to pupils about behaviour, attendance, how they learn to keep themselves safe and what it feels like to be a member of the Springfield House community. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived at school, during a whole school assembly, at breaks and lunchtime, as well as in lessons. Discussions with two school governors helped to provide additional information. Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including checks on the suitability of adults to work with children. They scrutinised minutes of governors' meetings and the school's information about pupils' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also took account of the seven responses to the staff questionnaire. There were insufficient replies to the online survey Parent View for these to be considered.