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Dear Andrew Penman

Short inspection of Westfield Arts College

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2016 with Tonwen Empson Her Majesty's 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

Under your continuing expert guidance, leaders and managers have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. At that time, it was recommended that you accelerate and implement plans to improve the sixth form so that its provision matches the very high standards found elsewhere in the school. You have indeed strengthened the sixth form in a well-organised and measured way. The school's mission statement, 'Broadening Horizons', now even more aptly describes the focus of the school's work and the many high-quality learning opportunities available to all pupils. As a result, the students who left the school in 2016 all transferred onto further education courses or entered full-time work.

Since the previous inspection you have successfully created a teaching alliance with four other special schools. In addition, a local university and 26 primary schools from across the county are working in partnership with the alliance to provide initial teacher training opportunities. As a result, the school is now recognised as a centre of excellence providing expertise, training and support not just to its partner schools but to other external agencies such as the National Health Service (NHS) and social services, who work with children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You, your senior leaders and the governing body possess a very clear knowledge

and understanding of each pupil's learning needs and the progress they are making to achieve their aspirational goals. This is because when pupils join the school they are carefully assessed by teachers to see what they know, understand and can do. However, we found that the progress of the youngest children is not monitored by senior leaders as robustly as it is for older pupils in the rest of the school.

Great care is taken by staff to set targets with the full involvement of pupils and their families. This information is then carefully considered and used to set individual learning targets for pupils. Targets are realistic yet also aspirational and these, along with outstanding teaching and learning, ensure that the majority of pupils make excellent progress towards achieving their targets.

The school's carefully tailored teaching programmes, interventions and rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress ensure that any gaps between disadvantaged pupils' progress and other pupils nationally are diminishing rapidly. Similarly, pupils identified as most able within the school are provided with additional support and opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities. For example, the school's success in removing obstacles to learning along with providing high-quality teaching has resulted in a steady increase in the numbers of pupils accessing GCSE courses.

Governors are experienced, highly skilled and passionate about the work they do for the school. Since the previous inspection, they have improved systems to challenge and hold the school to account in an informed way. Governors are very aware of the need to monitor the work of the teaching school alliance to keep the right balance in providing high-quality outreach support to schools and other agencies without compromising the core work of providing outstanding provision for pupils in the school.

All staff are very well supported and trained to carry out their work at the highest level. Staff say that morale throughout the school is high. They regularly meet together informally and as part of ongoing professional training and development. This ensures that staff are always up to date with the knowledge and skills they need to carry out their work. Target-setting for pupils is reviewed regularly and is always aspirational. For example, teachers expect and ensure that all key stage 1 pupils progress at a similar rate to their mainstream peers.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of high-quality safeguarding remains a strength of the school. All staff are well trained and encouraged to be vigilant and, when necessary, to report concerns. Staff get to know parents very well through visits home, letters, email and text. 'Whatever is the best way,' said one senior leader. Risk assessments are thoroughly carried out. For individual pupils, adults know what might spark inappropriate behaviour by an individual, along with strategies to de-escalate unwanted behaviours. Staff receive regular high-quality training for safety and safeguarding. Staff new to the school have this as part of their induction. Leaders

have a clear understanding of their duties, such as keeping pupils safe from the risks of radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. These are risks which all staff take very seriously. The school is currently in the process of introducing further positive behaviour training for staff that includes becoming familiar with strategies for when physical intervention may be necessary.

The school works extremely closely with other agencies and services to ensure the safety of those in its care. Systems to check on the effectiveness of safeguarding within the school are well established. Senior staff are confident in implementing safeguarding policy and challenging other agencies when they suspect that the safeguarding of pupils is being compromised.

The teaching of e-safety is given a high priority and carefully woven into the curriculum. The use of social media is monitored closely. All of the school's safeguarding documents, records, processes and procedures are fit for purpose and fully implemented. Pupils and students in the sixth form are effectively taught how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- Strong, visionary leadership that is exemplified through well-established monitoring and assessment processes to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is always of the highest standards and continues to improve outcomes for pupils.
- The school provides excellent support to other schools as part of its role in a teaching school alliance.
- Learning in classrooms is very carefully planned to be relevant to each pupil's need. It relates to everyday, real-life skills. Additional adults support pupils' learning extremely well.
- The movement of pupils on into different classes or learning groups is always managed very carefully and routines are carefully structured.
- All pupils are taught to read often with one to one support. High-quality resources, including 'big books', help to ensure that reading times are calm, quiet and productive.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is typically outstanding. This owes much to the calm, ordered environment established throughout the school. Adults have high expectations of pupils and as a result they talk politely to each other and staff.
- At break and lunchtimes pupils get on well with each other. When eating lunch, pupils manage their behaviour well and demonstrate good manners. Staff often eat in the lunch hall with pupils.
- Outside, pupils socialise and play well together. The school has completely renovated the main playground to provide large-scale play equipment and sensory opportunities for pupils. They have a wide range of equipment to use. The remodelled playground has been thoughtfully laid out and this allows the youngest children and oldest pupils to play alongside each other without fear of accidents happening. For example, a small group of pupils on bikes were moving safely around the playground on the marked roadway.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is carefully planned for. Westfield is a 'rights respecting school.' Throughout the school there are engaging displays, often with pupils' work incorporated in them, celebrating pupils' sporting achievements, festivals such as harvest, and pupils' work.
- An example of the creative interventions made available to pupils is the use of two 'therapy dogs' that visit the school once a week and provide targeted support to a small number of pupils at a time. The dogs are used to help pupils build relationships and develop their self-esteem by taking them for walks around the school grounds over several weeks.
- The curriculum taught throughout the school is carefully tailored to capture pupils' imaginations. It is continually being reviewed and adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of pupils. For example, two classrooms have recently been converted into a state-of-the-art drama studio. Pupils in all key stages are provided with learning experiences that are practical yet always meaningful. As a result, many pupils develop high self-esteem and go on to make a valuable contribution to society.
- Coaching and mentoring of staff are also strategies that are well embedded throughout the school. As a result, staff say that they feel their learning needs are taken seriously. You ensure that staff are given the time they need to update their knowledge and receive the training they need to fulfil their curriculum and leadership responsibilities.
- Teachers ensure that the teaching of reading, literacy and numeracy skills is a priority across the school. The teaching of phonics is carefully monitored throughout the school. Pupils' work is regularly checked by teachers, who work closely with other schools to make sure that pupils' standards are in line with national expectations.
- The pupils who spoke to inspectors were able to describe confidently how the school helps them to develop independent living skills alongside their academic learning. The 'independent living skills ladders' introduced by the school and displayed all around the campus helps remind pupils of the steps necessary to develop their independence. As one pupil said, 'The ladders help us to be independent, they give us challenges to master.' Students who met with an inspector say that they are proud of their school and the fundraising they did recently to help 'other children in need'.
- By the time most pupils complete their education at school they have developed high levels of resilience and skills to overcome many of the barriers that once hindered their learning and progress. Many pupils acquire a self-confidence that means they are well prepared to enter their next steps in education and progress towards realistic work or training destinations in the sixth form and beyond.
- Parents who met with an inspector spoke warmly of all that the school does for them and their children, in particular how well their children are nurtured and supported to achieve their full potential. The majority of parents who completed the online questionnaire also spoke very highly of the school. 'Westfield has provided a bedrock of care and education for our son throughout his education, willing to provide him with a vital, positive link to a place he felt safe and valued in' is typical of the many positive comments made by parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- checks on the youngest pupils' learning and progress are carried out as robustly as they are in the rest of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

David Edwards
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you to discuss and agree the lines of enquiry to explore. This included the work carried out by the school since the previous inspection to develop the sixth form so that its provision matches the very high standards found in the rest of the school. We also evaluated current safeguarding arrangements and how well leaders use pupils' assessment information on entry to the school to plan next steps in learning. Two focus groups of pupils were also considered; those pupils identified as disadvantaged, who receive additional funding to help support their learning, and those pupils you identify as most-able. The reasons for why these two groups of pupils make such outstanding progress during their time at Westfield were explored. I and a senior leader visited the sixth-form provision located at the local further education college.

A wide range of documentary evidence was made available to us, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information and the school's analysis of attendance and behaviour logs. We met with senior leaders, middle leaders, three members of the governing body and parent representatives. We visited classrooms, spoke with pupils and scrutinised their work in books and on display throughout the school. My colleague also met with a small group of students to hear their views and observed behaviour at break and lunchtime. We also took account of the 10 responses made by parents on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.