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Ms Madelaine Caplin  
Executive Headteacher  
Woodside School  
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Erith  
Kent  
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Dear Ms Caplin

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodside School**

Following my visit to your school on 20 April 2017, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to enable all pupils to make substantial progress from their starting points by ensuring that:

- teaching across the school is of a consistently high quality
- the new systems and structures are fully embedded, understood by all staff and regularly checked to make sure that they are having the desired effect.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, representatives from the school council, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan were evaluated. Short visits were made to 16 lessons across both sites and all key stages.

## **Context**

You joined the school shortly after the inspection in December 2013 that judged the school to require improvement. Since that time, you have been instrumental in significantly improving the culture and ethos of the school. Physical changes to the school environment, the appointment of a highly effective team of senior and middle leaders, a staffing restructure, a new assessment system and a revised curriculum are all having a highly positive impact on pupils' progress. In September 2016, the school joined with a local mainstream primary school to create the Belmont Woodside Federation. This affiliation has proved mutually beneficial for both schools. A new local governing board was established at this time to incorporate governors from both schools and recruit new ones. The school still faces many challenges by being housed on two separate sites. Plans are in place to close eventually the Belvedere site, though the transition of pupils may take some time. This has put significant pressure on school leaders as they attempt to recruit and retain the highest calibre of staff and minimise disruption to pupils' learning.

## **Main findings**

You have recently recruited a very strong leadership team, including a head of school. Together, you have very high expectations of the quality of education you intend to provide. Although you continue to face many challenges, you are resolute in your drive to establish a centre of excellence in the local authority for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have an honest and accurate understanding of the school's strengths, and have prepared a detailed plan to make further necessary improvements. Since the recruitment of your new leadership team, many new systems and structures have been incorporated, which are already beginning to have a demonstrable impact on the progress pupils make. However, you are clear that these measures now need to be embedded to ensure consistency in the high quality of education you are determined to provide.

The priority has been to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across both sites and establish an effective culture of learning. A new assessment system has been introduced to complement the new curriculum and ensure that pupils' progress is carefully tracked across each key stage and shared with parents, carers and pupils.

Pupils' ability is carefully assessed on entry, and staff work closely across the

federation to ensure that these baseline assessments are checked for accuracy. Teachers are encouraged to plan together, sharing their best practice, with the strongest teachers supporting those who are less experienced or skilled. Professional development opportunities are regular and of high quality, offering good staff training. The appointment of subject experts, such as the new head of mathematics, is providing advice and guidance to enhance teachers' confidence and skills. Performance management arrangements are robust and there are now clear lines of accountability. Leaders carefully and systematically deploy support for those pupils requiring additional help, be it therapy, family support or catering for their medical needs. Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve pupils' literacy and are currently introducing a more systematic approach to the teaching of phonics, fully supported through staff training.

Members of the new governing board are experienced and share your vision. Following an external review, the board has created an action plan to ensure that governors address any issues raised during the previous inspection. Information received from school leaders is easily accessible and allows governors the opportunity to challenge effectively.

Pupils across the school benefit from a nurturing and caring environment, which meets their complex needs. Staff encourage pupils to practise being independent in preparation for life after school. Pupils are encouraged to take on leadership roles on the school council, undertake fund-raising activities and support each other. They learn about keeping themselves safe online and practise key skills, such as road safety. Pupils mix well together and are respectful of each other's needs.

I am pleased to confirm that senior leaders and governors are taking effective action. However, you know that there is still much to do to ensure that all pupils and groups of pupils make substantial progress from their starting points. You know that the next academic year will potentially prove more challenging as the plans to close the Belvedere site gather speed. I am assured that your highest priority is to ensure the smooth transition of pupils so that their academic and emotional progress is not hindered. While recruitment and retention of high-quality staff continue to be issues, you are resolute in your determination to nurture existing staff, minimise disruption to pupils' routines and make high-calibre appointments.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided consistently good challenge and support. It has commissioned specific support, for example, enhancing the site still further through building development or supporting teachers to moderate pupils' writing accurately. The local authority focus board, established following the first inspection judgement of 'requires improvement', provides appropriate challenge to school leaders and governors. It supported the two schools as they federated.

You are an active member of the special educational needs and/or disabilities

implementation board, which ensures the commissioning of appropriate provision across the authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Matthews  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**