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Mrs Andrea Hemmens  
Headteacher  
Woodlands School  
Woodview Learning Community  
Picklecombe Drive  
Off Tamerton Foliot Road  
Plymouth  
Devon  
PL6 5ES

Dear Mrs Hemmens

### **Short inspection of Woodlands School**

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2017 with Justine Hocking, 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 good in December 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school, including the governing body, has been through turbulent times over the last few years. Difficult decisions have had to be made to ensure that the school's budget has been used effectively to benefit pupils' academic and personal development. You, and the governing body, have successfully achieved this. Senior leaders have a shared understanding and vision for the school's continued improvement. They complement each other well in their expertise and experience and use the information they keep about pupils' achievement to plan work which enables pupils to make good progress. However, you appreciate that overall, the middle leaders are less experienced, particularly those new to their roles and areas of responsibility.

The school has changed the way that it interviews new members of staff. This is helping retention rates and ensures that pupils have the best adults to support their learning and personal development during the school day. Nursing staff work seamlessly with other adults to make sure that pupils' medical needs are met effectively. The work of the nursing staff is 'part and parcel' of the school day, which enables pupils to be successful learners at Woodlands School.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their parents appreciate the hard work and dedication of staff. We discussed how pupils in the senior school would benefit from

more experiences of living in Plymouth and building stronger links with the world of work.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You, other leaders and the governing body ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the staff team work closely with the other agencies and providers to help protect the safety and well-being of pupils. All staff receive frequent, appropriate training. New staff have good-quality induction training in health, safety and safeguarding. This training is supporting new staff effectively to understand their roles and responsibilities to keep pupils safe.

When safety or safeguarding issues arise, the school works openly and adapts practice and procedures to reduce future risk. This includes making changes to the physical environment in negotiation with the company which owns the campus in which the school is situated.

The provision of weekly 'Family Team' meetings allows time for staff reflection. They provide a good opportunity for them to discuss concerns that any member of staff has about the pupils in their care. This enables all adults in the school to appreciate that ensuring the safety and safeguarding of the pupils is everybody's responsibility. Collectively, staff are able to ensure that the school's, other providers' and agencies' responses to pupils' needs are appropriate.

### **Inspection findings**

- Firstly, we evaluated how effectively assessment is used by teachers to drive pupils' achievements. This was an issue raised in the previous inspection in December 2013. Leaders provide staff with effective training, including in the teaching of phonics. This has resulted in high-quality literacy sessions which develop pupils' reading and writing skills well. Senior leaders, and some middle leaders, have a sharp focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment. They ensure that the assessment of pupils is accurate and consistent. Other middle leaders, new to their roles, have less experience at checking the quality and impact of their colleagues' work. They are receiving good training and support to develop their skills. We agreed that these leaders require further training to ensure that they develop the skills they need to support pupils to make the best possible progress.
- Next, we checked with you how effectively the governing body challenges and supports the leadership and management of the school. Again, this was an issue raised in the previous inspection. We found that they are proactive and highly supportive of the school. They are ambitious and demand the best for pupils. Governors have ensured that they receive detailed and comprehensive termly reports. These reports are now produced by the other key leaders in the school, including the nursing staff. This provides governors with a comprehensive picture of every aspect of the school and is used to hold all leaders and managers firmly to account.
- The inspection's third line of enquiry was to check how well the school's agreed

curriculum enables pupils to achieve well. Changes to the curriculum have raised teachers' expectations. The school's new approach to teaching and learning is providing pupils with more opportunities to develop skills that they need for day-to-day living. This is increasing their independence. It is helping to reduce their willingness to rely on adults to do basic things for them, when they can do them for themselves. Snack time and lunchtime are used well to further develop the learning objectives of individual pupils. The sixth-form curriculum and provision, in particular, are responsive to each individual cohort so that students are ready for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

- Communication between parents and the early years staff is strong. Parents of younger children particularly value the early years log which they can access on electronic devices. They reported that seeing photos and video footage of their children during the school day helps them to understand and talk to their children about their learning at school. We agreed that although senior-aged pupils did have experiences of the world of work, and had activities outside of school, more could be provided to develop their independence and skills further. For example, we discussed the use of supported internships and exploiting the facilities available on the school's campus.
- Finally, we looked at how well leaders check that pupils make good progress. There is a range of monitoring systems in place to check the quality of the school's work to measure and improve pupils' progress, including external validation. Staff take effective action where there is underperformance, involving training, coaching and further monitoring. This has resulted in improvements, for example, in the teaching of mathematics.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders continue to develop their experiences and expertise to drive improvements in teaching and learning in the areas for which they are responsible
- pupils in the senior years access more workplace learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We agreed the timetable and activities for the day. We worked with you and other senior leaders during the day. We met with other leaders and members of the governing body. We spoke with groups of pupils and observed them during the day. We examined the quality of pupils' work and observed pupils learning in lessons.

We considered a wide range of documentary evidence, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation and action plans.

Inspectors took account of the six responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspectors considered the 43 responses from staff to the Ofsted electronic survey. There were no responses from pupils to the Ofsted electronic survey. In addition, inspectors took note of paper questionnaires from staff, pupils and parents provided by the school covering the last two years.