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25 January 2018

Mr David Whitaker  
Executive Principal  
Springwell Special Academy  
St Helen's Boulevard  
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Barnsley  
South Yorkshire  
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Dear Mr Whitaker

### **Short inspection of Springwell Special Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 2018 with Louise Greatrex, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in January 2012.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement, which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

### **The school continues to be outstanding.**

Your very special 'special' school is calm and welcoming. You ensure that all staff are highly skilled in managing and developing pupils with a range of complex social, emotional and mental health needs through the provision of high-quality training and continuous professional development. It is creditable that eight of your teaching assistants have been, as you describe it, 'grown' to become teachers in the school. This level of expertise ensures that the school is a haven for the vulnerable pupils in Barnsley and beyond. Your staff care for the pupils. This care is exemplified by the way in which all pupils are individually welcomed by staff, who are waiting to collect them as they are dropped off safely each morning.

Following the inspection of your predecessor school, leaders were asked to ensure that parents and carers are better informed about standards of behaviour in school and in lessons by providing more information in newsletters. At Springwell Special Academy, parents are kept well informed about pupils' behaviour at school through your regular newsletters and by attending family learning days and celebration assemblies. Parents specifically appreciate the regular phone calls they receive from

their children's key worker.

Leaders recognise that some pupils do not make as much progress in their academic studies as they do in modifying and improving their behaviours for learning. Quite rightly, you have identified that some of these pupils do not attend school often enough. Too many are persistently absent and some are on part-time timetables for too long. These pupils, many of whom have multiple vulnerabilities in addition to their special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, need to be in school much more often to make the progress of which they are capable.

You, quite correctly, have identified the need to ensure that all pupils leave the school with high levels of literacy and numeracy. Your aim is for all to achieve GCSEs in English and mathematics in Year 11. Not all pupils are currently making the progress of which they are capable because of some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning across the key stages. A small minority of teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils academically.

Leaders' efforts to develop subject leadership are paying dividends. These middle leaders have an accurate understanding of standards in the subjects they lead. They understand the quality of teaching and learning through their insightful monitoring. Middle leaders feel valued and appreciated by the senior leadership team.

Governors support you and the school well. They find it difficult to evaluate the impact of the actions that leaders have taken to improve the school because they have few numerical targets against which to measure success.

The Wellspring Academy Trust's trustees review the performance of the school, at a strategic level, four times each academic year. The chief executive officer (CEO) brokers support for the school from the trust. Members of your leadership team support other schools in the trust on a regular basis, specifically concerning safeguarding and behaviour management. The trust has not challenged the number of pupils on part-time timetables with sufficient rigour.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are robust.

The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) ensures that staff know how to keep children safe in education. All staff attend dedicated training in child protection at the beginning of each academic year. Their skills and knowledge are updated at regular intervals throughout the year. In addition, the school's induction procedures for new staff have safeguarding and child protection at their core.

The DSL and members of her care team liaise very well with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils access the support to which they are entitled. The whole staff team know individual pupils and their families very well. The school is the first port of call for many families in times of trouble and strife. Pupils,

their parents and the community trust school staff implicitly.

Staff are fully aware of the school's whistleblowing procedures. They know and use the procedures to report concerns appropriately.

## **Inspection findings**

- Your staff are adept at supporting pupils to behave well at school. Information in the school's data management system shows that the numbers of behavioural and bullying incidents recorded for each cohort of pupils reduce over time. Pupils appreciate the safe spaces that are available for them to access should the need arise. They also like the activities that they take part in during the less structured times of the school day. For example, during the inspection two key stage 2 pupils were engrossed in a competitive game of chess with an adult. Your pupils respond well to the routines and procedures that staff have established, such as music to signify the end of morning break.
- Pupils do not attend school often enough. Too many are persistently absent. A tenth of the pupils are on part-time timetables. Of these, six pupils have not had access to full-time education for over six months. These pupils, many of whom have multiple vulnerabilities, are not accessing the full-time education to which they are entitled. Members of the school's care team, together with a number of external agencies, ensure that these pupils are safe when they are not in school. Overall, pupils' attendance at Springwell Special School is significantly better than their attendance at their previous schools.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at least good throughout the school. Teachers instil confidence in pupils and promote their self-worth. For example, pupils in one of the key stage 2 classes have made rapid progress in developing a neat and joined handwriting script since September. In another class, pupils are beginning to tackle problem-solving in mathematics because they can carry out calculations correctly. Pupils make rapid progress in English and mathematics when adults have the very highest expectations of them.
- Teachers and effectively deployed teaching assistants develop pupils' skills across the curriculum well. Key stage 2 pupils work safely and confidently in design and technology lessons. They use tools, such as vices and hacksaws, skilfully to produce products that match their initial plans closely. In Year 11, pupils' GCSE physical education workbooks show work of exceptional quality.
- Senior leaders are developing the skills of subject leaders, the school's middle leaders, well. Middle leaders understand the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subjects. They appreciate the time they are given to carry out research and development activities.
- You understand the school's strengths and areas for development well and acknowledge that governors would benefit from having numerical targets by which to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions. Governors are fully committed to improving the quality of the pupils' education further. They understand the school's strengths and acknowledge that pupils need to be in school more often to make the academic progress of which they are capable.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils attend school more often
- pupils, on part-time timetables, are reintegrated into full-time education speedily
- pupils, especially the most able, make rapid progress in English and mathematics to catch up with their peers nationally
- the school's development plans contain numerical targets against which governors can evaluate, and then either congratulate or challenge, the impact of actions taken by school leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Members of the inspection team discussed the work of the school with you, the associate executive principal, the safeguarding and care teams, subject leaders, teaching assistants, four governors, the vice-chair of trustees and the CEO from the Wellspring Academy Trust. I checked a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Inspectors examined information about pupils' attendance, behaviour, and achievements, both academically and behaviourally. I considered seven free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Alongside you, I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment. Team members checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, took note of one response by a pupil to Ofsted's online questionnaire, talked formally to groups of pupils from key stages 2, 3 and 4, and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime about their learning. An inspector also read with pupils from key stages 1 and 2.