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Ms C Patton
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Patton

Short inspection of Whitehouse Pupil Referral Unit

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2018 with Ofsted Inspector David Penny, 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 February 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered 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 grade of outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Over the past year, the profile of pupils attending the school has changed. Increasingly, the school is admitting pupils who have more complex social, emotional and mental-health needs. Typically, pupils moved on quickly after six weeks to a year but pupils now stay longer before moving to mainstream or special schools.

Together with governors and the trust, you have quickly adapted to this change by appointing specialist pastoral and behaviour leaders and by providing a wider range of support to pupils through life coaching, therapy and counselling. This is making a significant difference in pupils being ready to learn, and they do so quickly. However, the gaps in pupils' basic skills and the next steps they need to take are not identified sharply and teaching is not always matched closely enough to their needs. The information you shared with us shows that, after an initial rise, progress for many pupils is not sustained. Consequently, most pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics slows over time.

Governors are knowledgeable and ambitious for the school. They have a realistic view of the school's strengths and areas where development is needed. In my discussions with governors and senior leaders, all acknowledged that expectations of pupils' progress could be clearer and revisions to the school's assessment

systems needed to take place quickly.

A structured approach is helping pupils with complex emotional needs and mental-health difficulties to learn strategies to cope with their emotions. The introduction of daily sessions and opportunities to learn techniques to support self-regulation provides greater opportunities for pupils to learn and develop this key skill. High rates of physical restraint are starting to reduce but they also demonstrate that this recent work has yet to be embedded.

Parents and carers who talked to inspectors valued the communication they receive from school, especially the 'good day' notes. They feel that communication is a strength of the school. They say that you and your staff make time to be available, are approachable and know their children well.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a culture in which staff are trained, aware of their responsibilities and vigilant in identifying concerns. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that they are acted on. She maintains effective working links with the local authority, other agencies and community and mental-health teams when more help is needed for vulnerable pupils. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and have been strengthened further following a recent review by the trust. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children.

The school acts in the interests of children and works closely with parents for the safety and protection of pupils. The school site is secure and pupils are pleased about this. Together with the high levels of supervision and watchfulness by staff, they say it helps them to feel safe. Pupils feel listened to and are involved in learning how to stay safe and keep safe. 'My Safety Plans', in which each pupil considers what helps them to feel safe and in control of their behaviour, are a positive development. Staff use these constructively with pupils to meet their individual safeguarding and emotional needs. Many pupils settle quickly into school and exhibit a degree of confidence in lessons that demonstrates that they feel safe.

Incidents of bullying, racism and prejudice in all forms are rare. School records show that they are always investigated and pupils say that they are quickly resolved. Generally, pupils accept that physical restraint is something that needs to happen when individuals 'kick off', but some report that they do not like being held. The school is working to reduce the high number of physical restraints and keeps a close check to make sure that they are for the shortest time possible. However, records of incidents do not always include sufficient detail.

Attendance rates are below average. You follow up absence diligently to assure yourself that pupils are safe and have a clear grasp of circumstances preventing their regular attendance. The school's information shows that pupils' individual attendance is not always significantly better than in their previous schools.

Inspection findings

- Behaviour was consistently well managed by staff during the inspection. A policy of 'no raised voices' was very much in evidence and teachers and all adults consistently spoke to pupils in positive ways, finding ways to subtly praise them. Your insistence on pupils' learning the behaviour expected in lessons, when walking around the building and in dining rooms is effective. Most pupils respond well to the very clear expectations the school has of them. They settle into school routines and build positive relationships with staff.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and engagement in lessons develop quickly in response to interesting activities. Pupils are motivated by them and make significant gains in sustaining their concentration. Pupils are beginning to build knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics and art and are proud of their work in these subjects. Their writing and sketchbooks are neat and show great care and attention to detail.
- Some pupils are increasingly able to do more for themselves, without the need for support. Staff know when to let pupils try for themselves and work independently. However, pupils are ready to take on more challenge. Most who responded to the inspection survey say that they are not challenged enough.
- Unlike their targets for behaviour, pupils' learning goals and academic targets are not specific enough in diagnosing gaps in their learning or their next steps. Although additional support in literacy and numeracy takes place, it has not helped pupils to make substantial progress to catch up from their low starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- academic targets are sharply focused on individual pupils' next steps in reading, writing and mathematics and teachers check their progress to ensure that work is challenging
- school assessment processes and expectations of progress are clear, understood by all staff and applied consistently
- urgent action is taken to reduce absence and improve attendance rates.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Kingston-upon-Hull. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, a range of activities were carried out to gather information on the key lines of enquiry. Inspectors met with you and the head of school to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. We visited classrooms, met with teachers and discussed pupils' work with them. With senior leaders we evaluated a range of work in pupils' books. The schools records of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour logs and other documentation were looked at. We met with two governors and two representatives from Venn Academy Trust. We spoke to two parents. No responses were made to Parent View. Responses from eight pupil questionnaires and 16 staff surveys were considered. The effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, including those related to recruitment, was checked.