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Mrs Lesley Yates
Headteacher
Whiteheath Education Centre
Hawes Lane
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Dear Mrs Yates

Short inspection of Whiteheath Education Centre

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2018 with Johanne Clifton 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 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.**

Your appointment as headteacher in September 2016 marked an important turning point for the school. You brought fresh ideas and energy to the role and, with the support of a reconstituted and able management committee, established a new vision and direction for the school. The number of pupils attending the school is growing. Many of these new pupils are younger and have a broad range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Your new vision is for the school to work alongside other local schools to provide the best possible short-term support for vulnerable or disengaged pupils, and those needing medical or therapeutic support. This vision is shared by the great majority of your hard-working and committed staff. You are well supported in this by partner schools in the area and by the local authority.

Increasingly, pupils are being helped to either return to a mainstream school or to continue their education after the age of 16 in a mainstream setting. Your fierce commitment to improving all pupils' self-confidence, attendance, personal development and academic progress is a key factor in helping pupils make the most of their time at the school.

Your arrival at the school coincided with the retirement of many long-serving and

experienced teachers. Following this, you have made a large number of new appointments to the school. A key role, however, remains unfilled and other senior roles are adversely affected by irregular attendance.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe when they are at the school. They know whom to turn to if they have concerns and are confident that issues they raise will be acted on. Instances of bullying or aggressive behaviour are rare. If they do occur, they are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

The school provides a calm and safe environment for pupils. It helps pupils grow in confidence and develop personally as well as academically. Staff know individual pupils and their circumstances very well. Care and support for pupils are tailored and effective. A few pupils lack specific knowledge about how to keep themselves safe online but this is being tackled urgently.

Systems for safeguarding pupils are strong. All staff understand what to do if a safeguarding issue arises. Liaison with external agencies is frequent and school leaders are persistent in following up referrals made to children's social services or health service teams.

Safeguarding training for staff is relevant and regular. It includes well-received sessions on child protection, extremism, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Careful record-keeping ensures that all staff who require training receive it. The approach taken to reporting safeguarding concerns, across a wide range of circumstances, is well established. Staff are kept up to date about any serious matters affecting pupils and safeguarding information is shared well across the school.

Leaders and governors review safeguarding arrangements regularly, including through arranging regular external audits. Leaders afford safeguarding a high priority and promote a culture of vigilance among the staff. Checks on newly appointed staff, and others who come into contact with pupils, are well organised, thorough and efficient. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- Pupils attend this school because they have a social, emotional or health need that makes regular attendance at a mainstream school difficult. Until recently, most pupils started at the school during Year 10 or Year 11. This has changed, and pupils now join the school at a younger age. These younger pupils include many more who have been unable to conform to their previous school's code of conduct.
- Careful organisation helps to ensure that the school is an orderly community. Pupils usually behave well and work hard in lessons. They move about the school sensibly and are at ease with each other during well-supervised break and lunchtimes.
- Staff are adept at managing any friction that occurs between pupils. Many staff are

very experienced and know the pupils well. This helps to ensure that any instances of disruption are managed quickly and effectively.

- Lessons are usually well organised and pupils work productively. Pupils work quietly on their own but respond well also to external stimuli such as visiting teachers. Careful planning in the best lessons ensures that teaching is matched to pupils' individual needs and interests. Most pupils make good academic progress overall. Pupils taught at home make good progress given their starting points.
- In a few instances, teaching relies too much on single worksheets. In these lessons, teaching can lack the precision needed and the work set is not well matched to the pupils' earlier learning.
- Many pupils with more complex needs often have underdeveloped oracy, literacy and numeracy skills. Not all teachers help these pupils improve these skills consistently enough. Teachers do not insist that work is always well presented and pupils are not expected to write at enough length.
- A significant number of new staff have joined the school since the last inspection. They are inducted and supported well. Not all have recent experience of working in this sort of setting but its very small size means that they can get to know pupils and the systems that support them very quickly.
- Middle leadership of key areas has been strengthened by new appointments. These new middle leaders are injecting greater pace into lessons and refreshing expectations of what pupils can achieve. New assessment procedures are providing a stronger starting point for robust target-setting and more regular checks on pupil progress.
- Teachers have benefited from a variety of training since the last inspection, which has helped to keep them abreast of local and national developments. However, the recent change in profile of the school's pupils means that some staff are struggling to plan in enough detail for the wide range of prior attainment and needs among pupils.
- Senior leaders are working very hard to support teachers in responding to the change in pupils' needs. They have identified the actions needed to improve teaching and strengthen outcomes. However, irregular attendance by some senior staff is limiting the school's capacity to adapt to its changing circumstances. The key post of special educational needs coordinator has been filled temporarily by an experienced leader from another school but this arrangement ends shortly.
- Pupils at the school study a suitable range of subjects given their prior educational experiences. At key stage 3, pupils follow the national curriculum. At key stage 4, pupils exercise choice and typically study eight or more GCSE subjects, but this does vary depending on each pupil's educational history.
- Attendance is improving. The school works well with external agencies to reduce poor or irregular attendance. Most pupils' attendance is much better than it was at their previous school. Punctuality to lessons is good. A significant number of pupils who were previously taught at home are now attending school.
- Outside of lessons, pupils attend weekly enrichment classes and participate in regular visits to local sporting, cultural and artistic venues. Where relevant, individual tuition is organised for pupils with a special interest. For example, pupils

learn horse riding or are encouraged to play music to develop their creative instincts and to help express their emotions. A few pupils play the keyboard to a very high standard.

- Pupils usually leave the school with much more confidence than when they started. They achieve a good range of relevant qualifications. Careful and painstaking work with each pupil, which includes good careers advice and guidance, helps to prepare them well for the next stage in their education or training. Where appropriate, pupils go on to study for level 3 vocational qualifications or A levels. Useful links exist with local colleges.
- All pupils at the school have a special educational need and/or disability. These pupils are supported thoughtfully and usually do very well during their time at school. In a few instances, teaching does not take enough account of their individual circumstances. Disadvantaged pupils are supported well by the pupil premium, which is used effectively to bolster self-esteem and academic progress.
- Governance is very good. The chair of the management committee has a wide breadth of relevant experience and is very well supported by skilled and enthusiastic governors. Statutory responsibilities are discharged well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching focuses more sharply on the specific needs of pupils who now attend the school
- leadership capacity is strengthened by filling existing vacancies and by tackling remaining irregular staff attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Cladingbowl
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors visited lessons and met with pupils. They spoke to teachers and other staff, senior staff, governors and a representative from the local authority. They scrutinised a range of documents, including information about the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils. They visited the hospital school and examined records of home tuition visits. Inspectors took account of 16 responses to Parent View, the online parental questionnaire, including nine written comments. They took account of 17 responses to the staff questionnaire and 10 responses to the pupil questionnaire.