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Miss Rosie Clark
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Dear Miss Clark

Short inspection of Woodlands School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 2018 with Emma Phillips, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in December 2017, you have built on the strengths of the school. Staff, governors and parents and carers have already begun to see the impact of your drive and determination to secure the best possible outcomes for all pupils in the school. As one parent expressed it, 'Woodlands is the epitome of fantastic'.

You rightly believe that communication is the key to the development of every aspect of pupils' progress. To this end, you have ensured that all pupils have access to a robust communication system. Staff are highly trained in the use of relevant communication aids and devices and are thus able to support every pupil in developing their communication skills. This training is also offered to parents, so that they can continue the excellent practice of the school with their children at home. Parents are proud of their children's progress with their communication and say that the school has given their children a voice. Community links are a strong feature of the school; for instance, pupils have worked with the local county council to develop communication boards to be installed in a local playground in order to make it more inclusive for all.

Staff are highly motivated and enjoy working at the school. They know that leaders value the excellent work that they do. Staff rightly value the work that is being done to enhance staff well-being. They are very well trained and feel exceptionally well supported, as evidenced in a recent staff survey. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils were evident during this inspection, and staff are relentless in their efforts to encourage pupils to be as independent as possible. There is a strong

commitment to staff development throughout the school, and career progression is encouraged. This is evidenced by the number of support staff who have gained further qualifications in teaching and learning. There are also several young people successfully undertaking apprenticeships as classroom assistants.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths as well as the areas that you wish to develop. Their strategic oversight provides very effective challenge to the school.

Leaders have developed the joint working between class teams and therapists. This joint working has led to exceptional improvements in communication, mobility and independence in pupils. Parents really appreciate the more integrated therapeutic approach to their children's learning. They told inspectors that they feel consulted and able to put forward ideas.

Preparing pupils for the next steps in their education is a very strong feature throughout the school. All pupils go to a college or social care setting when they leave the school. Staff provide training in communication systems and devices for staff in these settings. This ensures that all pupils continue to make progress when they are in their new settings. Another strong feature of the school is the work done by staff to ensure that pupils get off to a flying start when they first come to the school. Careful consideration is given when pupils move to new classes at the beginning of a new academic year. This ensures that pupils continue to make exceptional progress with their learning. The assessment of the progress that pupils make towards meeting their individual targets is detailed and thorough. Leaders have worked closely with other schools to devise systems that more appropriately track the progress of all groups of pupils at the school. Leaders recognise that there is a need to become more incisive in determining the benefits of the use of specific funding for vulnerable groups.

Pupils like coming to school. They told inspectors that they enjoy their lessons and value highly the extra activities and trips that staff organise for them. They reported that they feel safe and happy in school and they know who to go to if they are worried or upset. They described Woodlands School as 'wonderful' and 'exciting'. As one parent reported, 'this school is a real community and you can feel the positivity and joy the moment you enter the school'.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are very strong procedures in place for safeguarding pupils at the school. Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Robust checks on staff are carried out before they take up a post and no one is permitted free access to the school until all checks have been confirmed. Nothing is left to chance. Induction training for new staff is very thorough. The staff code of conduct is an important part of this, as is the initial safeguarding training. Staff are highly vigilant and raise concerns immediately. These are followed up by leaders who are tenacious in their work to secure improved outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding is a regular agenda item for all meetings. There is annual safeguarding training for all staff and regular updates during weekly briefing meetings. Governors play a key role in monitoring the safeguarding practices across the school.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. This was demonstrated in their responses to the inspection pupil survey and when inspectors spoke with them. Parents agree that their children are happy at school and they feel that they are well looked after. The curriculum reflects the strong safeguarding ethos of the school. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online. Parents are also offered training in how to ensure that their children remain safe online when they are at home.

Leaders work highly efficiently with parents, carers and outside agencies to protect pupils. Meticulous records show that staff are vigilant and report any concerns immediately. Staff show a high level of care for pupils. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and trust staff to deal with their concerns. Parents report that their children are very well cared for in school and that all staff are committed to the well-being of all pupils.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on the following areas: whether safeguarding is effective; whether leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement noted at the last inspection; how leaders ensure that all pupils make or continue to make excellent progress; and how leaders ensure that the best use is made of funding for specific groups of pupils.
- Leaders have reduced effectively the proportion of pupils taking holidays during term time. Parents are reminded in termly newsletters of the impact that absences have on pupil progress. Any requests are very carefully considered, taking into account the pupil's current progress. As a result, requests have reduced over time. If any pupils do fall behind in their learning as a result of absence, then interventions are put in place to enable the pupil to catch up. All absences are tracked thoroughly by leaders to ensure that no groups of pupils are falling behind.
- All pupils make at least good progress towards their ambitious targets, and many make exceptional progress. This is due to the carefully designed curriculum, along with purposeful and well-planned lessons. Teachers work closely with therapists to ensure that each pupil is able to access the curriculum in order to improve their independence, mobility and communication skills. The curriculum is enhanced with many opportunities for trips and activities within the community which contribute significantly to increasing pupil independence.
- Funding for specific groups is used in creative ways, for instance to improve the attendance at parental annual reviews. Records show that attendance has increased to 100%. Increased opportunities to enhance pupils' progress with their mobility and communication have also been provided from these grants.

Leaders are able to explain how this spending has had a positive impact on pupils, but now need to be more incisive in demonstrating that these outcomes have been achieved as a result of specific interventions provided by the funding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they analyse more precisely the impact on pupils' progress of the use of specific funding.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Edwards
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the Inspection, inspectors visited classrooms, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and assessing the quality of pupils' work. Inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders during classroom visits. Inspectors assessed pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in classrooms and around the school. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders and newly qualified teachers, the vice-chair of the governing body accompanied by two other governors, and a representative group of pupils. Telephone calls were made to the school's current and recent school improvement partners. Inspectors took into account 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, and free-text responses. Inspectors considered a recent staff survey carried out by the school. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including policies, pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, and minutes of governing body meetings.