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Mrs K Haworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Haworth

Short inspection of Woodlands School

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 2018 with Claire Hollister, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are supported well by your leadership team. Staff and governors share your enthusiasm for learning and high expectations, which embody the school motto: 'Together we raise aspirations for independence and lifelong learning'.

Parents are very happy with the school. All parents who commented on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, would recommend the school to others. Parents appreciate the time you have given at the start of each day to welcome their children to school since your appointment in September. They said that concerns are dealt with quickly. Parents comment positively about the individual care, guidance and support that they receive from you and your staff. 'The school is like a family' and 'I cannot thank them enough' are typical of comments made by parents.

Older pupils who met with the inspector said that they like coming to school. They enjoy the outdoor play equipment and being in small groups. Pupils feel cared for and listened to by adults in school. The voice of the child is valued by leaders. For example, pupils contribute to their annual reviews and decisions made about their own learning. The positive relationships fostered within school contribute to the good progress pupils make from their individual starting points.

Leaders have successfully resolved the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The training that staff receive is shared with colleagues effectively. The

quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Leaders have established a strong culture of professional dialogue, support and challenge among staff. Staff work together to share knowledge and expertise with each other. This is particularly helpful for staff new to the school. Skilled support staff are deployed well to maximise learning opportunities for pupils. Although staff work with colleagues in another specialist school, we discussed the work your staff do in a range of mainstream settings in the local authority to enable staff to help pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and their families.

Staff know and understand the complex needs of pupils in their care. Staff have developed a bespoke curriculum for each individual pupil. Staff use a wide range of evidence to inform the next steps in pupils' learning. Skilfully designed activities meet the needs and interests of the pupils well. Pupils are calm, focused and engaged in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Procedures are clearly understood by staff and are followed diligently. Staff receive regular training and weekly updates on any potential areas of risk for the pupils. Appropriate checks are in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils, including volunteers and adults who are in school regularly. All records relating to safeguarding are maintained meticulously. Staff engage closely with parents, carers and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

Older pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, and they know who to tell if they are worried. The school website offers good advice to parents on how to keep their children safe online when they are at home. Pupils who met with the inspector said that they enjoy coming to school. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well cared for when they are at school.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry looked at the actions that leaders have taken to resolve the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders have ensured that staff have the knowledge and skills to meet the complex needs of pupils. Staff work well together to share ideas and expertise. Time is used efficiently to maximise learning opportunities for pupils, including break times and lunch times. For example, staff have developed individual placemats for pupils at mealtimes. The information printed on the mat informs staff of the skills pupils are developing, for example communication skills, independent self-help skills or tasting new foods, flavours and textures. As a result, staff support pupils well and good progress is made.
- Leaders have ensured that staff are able to evaluate pupils' needs effectively. As a result, the next steps in pupils' learning are identified accurately. Staff check with colleagues, including colleagues in other schools, that their judgements are correct using detailed evidence gathered from a range of sources. Targets are relevant, clear and measurable. Staff plan well-thought-out activities, and

appropriate resources support learning well. Skilled staff understand pupils' complex needs well. Staff are deployed effectively to maximise opportunities for learning. For example, staff ensure that older pupils have the relevant vocabulary in their communication books to enable them to access work in literacy. Staff use questions skilfully and model language effectively. As a result, pupils are beginning to develop their own ideas and communicate them to others effectively. Pupils are actively engaged with learning activities. Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. You are developing opportunities for staff to share their knowledge and expertise with staff in mainstream settings which have pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of this.

- Next, we discussed the actions taken to improve attendance, particularly for pupils who are persistently absent from school. Historically, parents have taken family holidays during term time. This affects the progress that pupils make. Leaders have worked with families to raise the importance of attending school regularly. Leaders know pupils and their individual circumstances well. Staff have developed positive relationships with families to help them establish effective routines at the start of each day. They work closely with other professionals to ensure that families receive the support and guidance that they need. Most pupils arrive at school by local authority transport. Staff liaise closely with drivers and escorts if a pupil is not collected from home at the start of the day. Leaders swiftly follow up on any concerns. For example, they make telephone calls to parents or carers or a visit to the home. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced this academic year. Leaders need to build on this improvement to ensure that pupils who are persistently absent attend school each day.
- I was interested in how leaders had developed the curriculum to support pupils' academic and personal needs. Leaders have developed a curriculum to focus on each pupil individually to meet their complex needs, through enabling pupils to develop their ability to communicate with others across a range of subjects, and to promote their independence skills effectively. Teachers meet with parents to discuss their aspirations for their children prior to pupils starting school. Teachers gather information from a range of other sources, including other professionals who work with the pupil and their family, for example speech therapists and physiotherapists. Teachers identify the next steps in pupils' learning accurately. Each pupil has very specific targets which are developed and shared with parents, staff and pupils as part of their personalised learning intention map.
- Pupils' social, emotional and sensory needs are catered for effectively. Detailed evidence, for example annotated photographs and video clips, is gathered using an online system. Teachers use the communication matrix effectively to identify pupils' next steps and highlight the progress that pupils make. Staff work with parents so that they have the skills to help their children at home. The school's detailed assessment information is strong. It shows clearly that pupils are making progress from their individualised starting points, over time. Pupils thrive in the nurturing atmosphere promoted within the school. Pupils are prepared well for the next stage in their education and all students move on to further education. However, there are limited opportunities for older pupils to improve their

independent living skills further in the wider community.

- Finally, we looked at pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and how you work with the local authority to support pupils' needs effectively. All pupils who attend Woodlands School have an EHC plan. Parents who spoke with me raised their concerns about the accuracy of the information in the EHC plans, particularly those EHC plans for older pupils who had previously had a statement of special educational need. Leaders have raised parents' concerns with the local authority. Working closely with the local authority, leaders have acted swiftly to resolve parents' concerns. Leaders are working to ensure that EHC plans identify pupils' barriers to learning accurately. Staff liaise with parents to ensure that the specific provisions needed are in place to support pupils, enabling them to achieve their individual outcomes. The EHC plans for younger pupils are focused and specific, ensuring the appropriate targets are set for each individual pupil. Annual reviews are very detailed. They are developed with parents, staff and pupils. Evidence gathered throughout the academic year is shared with parents termly. Consequently, they have a good understanding of the progress that their children are making. Targets accurately meet the needs of pupils and provide appropriate challenge. Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop opportunities within the wider community to promote students' independent living skills.
- further develop the support you provide for staff in mainstream settings which have pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- build on the improvements in pupils' attendance to ensure that pupils who are persistently absent from school attend regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you, other members of the leadership team and staff. We also spoke with three members of the governing body and had a conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited classrooms with

you, where we had the opportunity to speak with pupils and staff. We met with a group of pupils formally during the day and spoke with several parents at the start of the school day. I took account of 30 responses to the staff questionnaire. I also considered the five free-text comments and the seven responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. We scrutinised pupils' assessment information and a range of documentation, including the single central record.