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Mr C Fielding
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Dear Mr Fielding

Short inspection of Forwards Centre

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019 with Doreen Davenport, 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 good in March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Your passion for learning and high aspirations for pupils are shared by staff and governors. You are supported well by leaders and members of the trust. You have established a skilled team which empowers pupils to believe in themselves and endeavour to be the very best that they can be.

Parents and carers who spoke to me were extremely positive about the care, guidance and support that you and your staff provide for their children. They speak very highly of the time that you give to build relationships with the whole family. Parents and carers appreciate all the opportunities that you make available for them and their children. Parents particularly like the fortnightly coffee morning 'drop-ins' and the workshops that help them with strategies to help their children at home. Comments from parents and carers, for example, 'I can't put into words the difference it has made to my son's life and mine since he joined the Forward Centre. He really feels like he belongs' and 'I feel like I have got my son back', typically reflect the views of those who spoke to inspectors.

Pupils are very polite and well mannered. They conduct themselves extremely well both during lessons and when moving around school. Pupils are calm, focused and engaged in their learning. They take the responsibilities that they are given very seriously. Pupils are proud of their achievements and also celebrate the achievements of others. They strive to earn the awards available for effort and achievement. Once a pupil has achieved 60 consecutive successful days, they are presented with a hoodie, which they wear with extreme pride. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities that leaders provide to enrich the curriculum. These include music lessons, dance, drama, trips to local museums and art galleries and outdoor learning experiences.

Leaders have established a strong culture of professional dialogue, support and challenge among staff. Staff who spoke to inspectors said that they feel valued and listened to by leaders. Staff training enables them to work together to share knowledge and expertise with each other. Skilled support staff are deployed well to maximise learning opportunities for pupils in a nurturing and calm environment. Staff know the pupils extremely well and understand their individual complex needs.

The majority of pupils who attend the Forward Centre have either been permanently excluded from mainstream school or are at risk of exclusion due to behavioural, social or emotional difficulties. You work closely with schools to ensure that pupils are supported well as they join the school and when they move on to a permanent placement. We discussed this in more detail during the inspection. Staff use a wide range of evidence to identify the precise gaps in pupils' knowledge and social and emotional development. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who are supported by an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The evidence is used to inform the precise next steps in pupils' learning. You have developed a bespoke curriculum for each individual pupil. This ensures that pupils are given the appropriate support and challenge they need to succeed and reach the potential that they are capable of. I was interested to find out more about the curriculum during the inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and are followed closely by staff. Records are meticulously kept. Statutory checks are diligently carried out on the suitability of adults to work with pupils, including governors and trustees. Appropriate training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding and are vigilant about potential risks. Leaders follow up any absences rigorously and provide excellent support to families so that pupils can attend school regularly. Risk assessments are carried out for trips and visits. Detailed assessments are done for the most vulnerable pupils to allow them to access the opportunities provided.

Staff engage closely with parents, carers and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being, including pupils who are dual-registered. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they feel safe and secure in school. They are confident that there is someone that they can talk to should they have any concerns or worries. They understand the different forms of bullying and are confident that if

bullying were to take place, it would be dealt with quickly by staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when they are online.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we discussed several lines of enquiry. The first was about how you engage with schools and the local authority to ensure smooth transitions for pupils as they join and leave the Forward Centre. Pupils typically join the school at various times throughout the academic year. The head of inclusion for the local authority meets each month with leaders to review pupils' progress. They focus particularly on pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. They also review the most appropriate next steps in the pupils' education, which will typically be a move into more specialist provision. Leaders engage well with parents and other agencies to ensure that pupils are provided with the appropriate support to enable them to succeed. Pupils are prepared well for the next step in their education. All of the pupils who moved on to specialist provision at the end of the last academic year have been successful in their transition to a permanent placement.
- Leaders work very effectively with other schools when pupils are at risk of exclusion due to behavioural, social or emotional difficulties. These pupils typically attend the Forward Centre for two terms. However, this may vary depending on the needs of individual pupils. Staff from the pupils' previous schools maintain close links with pupils and their families through visits and meetings. Leaders and staff meet regularly with parents and other professionals to review pupils' progress against their agreed targets. Attendance is also monitored weekly. Any concerns are followed up swiftly by the previous schools' pastoral teams. There are bespoke transition arrangements to support pupils going back into their previous schools. Staff from these schools comment positively on the support and guidance that they receive from the key workers at the Forward Centre. They particularly value the guidance they receive on the most effective strategies to use when supporting pupils on their return. The vast majority of pupils who have returned to mainstream schools have been successfully reintegrated. You are endeavouring to reduce the proportion of primary-age pupils who are at risk from exclusion by developing further the work that you do to share your staff's expertise within mainstream schools.
- I was also interested in the curriculum that you have designed to meet pupils' academic and social and emotional needs. Leaders ensure that training for staff gives them the knowledge and understanding they need to support pupils' complex needs very effectively. Baseline assessment information in reading and mathematics is gathered during the initial two weeks after pupils arrive at the school. Leaders identify the precise gaps in pupils' knowledge. Specific targets are set during discussions with staff and parents. Teachers plan individual learning opportunities for pupils which provide appropriate levels of support and challenge. Targets are reviewed weekly with leaders and shared with parents. Skilled support staff are deployed very effectively to ensure that pupils are given the help that they need to catch up. Pupils' work shows that the vast majority are making very good progress from their baseline starting points, particularly in mathematics. Teachers' high expectations are reflected in the improvements in

the quality of work that pupils produce, particularly their written work. Pupils' good presentation and handwriting typically reflect the pride that they take in their achievements.

- Leaders have designed a social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) curriculum. This is based on the following key principles: building relationships and making friends, understanding things that make pupils anxious, accepting that learning means trying hard and making lots of mistakes, and exploring the choices they make. Leaders accurately assess the specific social and emotional barriers that pupils face. They use their expertise and knowledge to develop strategies which support pupils very effectively to be able to make the right choices about their behaviour. Leaders also work with parents to give them the confidence and skills to be able to support their children effectively at home. Staff develop opportunities for pupils to be able to succeed and enjoy learning by building their self-esteem and belief in themselves. For example, during an art lesson, pupils investigated enthusiastically how to mix primary colours and were delighted with the beautiful colours they created when painting pictures of dragons. Pupils make exceptionally strong progress towards their SEMH targets. As a result, the vast majority are prepared well for the next steps in their education and successfully join their peers back in mainstream schools.
- Finally, we looked at the quality of EHC plans and how leaders work with the local authority to support pupils with SEND. Leaders have good subject knowledge. They use this to put very clear systems in place to be able to assess pupils quickly during their first two weeks in school. Leaders have developed clear pathways to be able to identify pupils' SEMH barriers to learning. Meetings are held in week three with parents and a number of other agencies, to set out personalised targets for pupils. This is particularly the case when pupils are not supported by an EHC plan. Leaders work closely with other professionals to ensure that pupils receive the help and support that they need. EHC plans are of a good quality. For pupils who already have an EHC plan, leaders work with professionals to develop the targets most relevant to the current setting. Targeted training gives staff the knowledge to be able to support pupils' complex needs. Leaders meet weekly with staff to check that learning tasks link closely with pupils' individualised learning plans. Pupils' progress is also checked at this time. Detailed records are shared fortnightly with parents and key professionals. The records clearly show that pupils are making very strong progress from their baseline assessments. Leaders meet monthly with the head of inclusion in the local authority to ensure that pupils supported by an EHC plan are accessing the additional support they need. Transition for pupils who move into specialist provision is very successful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue in their endeavours to share principles and practice with mainstream schools in developing strategies that support the most vulnerable pupils and reduce the proportion of pupils at risk from exclusion.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you, other members of the leadership team and with staff. We also spoke with three members of the governing body and the executive principal of the trust. We also met with representatives from the local authority. Inspectors visited classrooms with leaders, where we had the opportunity to speak with pupils and look at their work. We met with pupils formally during the day and spoke with parents at the start of the school day. We took account of three responses to the staff questionnaire and the 23 responses to the pupils' questionnaire. We also considered the three free-text comment responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. We scrutinised pupils' information and a range of documentation, including risk assessments and the single central record.