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Mr Dan Woodman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Woodman

Short inspection of The Edith Borthwick School

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 2018 with Paul Copping, 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 2014.

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 good as a result of this inspection.**

Since becoming the headteacher in September 2016, you have embedded a strong vision that every pupil who attends The Edith Borthwick School has learning opportunities that are suited to their individual needs and aspirations. Your focus has been to raise the quality of teaching, learning and achievement for pupils. This has been achieved well. Pupils and parents and carers are effusive in their praise for the experience that the school provides. In particular, parents are extremely positive about the changes that you have brought.

Since your arrival, you have increased the pace of school improvement. However, there has not been sufficient support to ensure that checks made on the school's work are consistently thorough. It became apparent during the inspection that some leaders do not have precise clarity about their roles and responsibilities and, as a result, are not undertaking the checks you expect. Most notably, although pupils are well cared for on a day-to-day basis, the leadership of a number of aspects of the pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is weaker.

Governors are fully behind you in the drive for school improvement. They realise that the implementation of new processes and procedures is challenging. They feel that 'the wind is now in our sails' and they are able to discuss the work of the

school in a constructive and balanced way. The governing body is actively engaged in the life of the school and is developing a clearer picture of the strategic changes needed to move the school forward.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff understand how to recognise any signs that a pupil is at risk, and know what to do if they have any concerns. Leaders' work with external agencies to support the most vulnerable pupils is effective. Your safeguarding leaders are tenacious in chasing external agencies when you feel that pupils are not getting the support that they need. Records of this work are well maintained and detailed.

Parents and pupils are effusive about how the school keeps its pupils safe. Pupils are confident that staff look after them well. They said that they feel safe and know how to seek help from staff when needed.

You undertake appropriate checks on staff who are in your employment. A number of your longer-serving staff have older-style recruitment checks. Although these are still compliant, you are in the process of updating them. However, we identified during the inspection that there has not been enough quality assurance or review of the recording and administration of staff recruitment. As a result, records, including records of the references taken on staff, are not consistently well maintained.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, we reviewed the quality of the curriculum and assessment processes in meeting the varied and wide-ranging needs of pupils. This is because published information about the school does not give a full picture of the progress of pupils from their starting points. Additionally, inspectors in the previous inspection in 2014 identified that writing and the leadership of curriculum and assessment were areas for development.
- You have focused on developing a high-quality and accessible curriculum for pupils during their time with you. The school's 'irresistible curriculum' supports pupils to develop the skills they need to prepare them for successful adult lives. Pupils enjoy this individualised approach based on assessment of what they need to learn next and access a wide range of opportunities, including drama and dance classes, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and residential trips.
- Writing and the teaching of writing have improved in the school. Pupils are well supported to develop their basic writing skills in every key stage. Pupils try their best and are enthusiastic to share their work with others. They are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Staff plan very effectively for the needs of children in the Nursery and Reception classes. This planning uses a good range of sensory resources to meet children's learning and development needs. These allow the children to transition throughout their school day smoothly. Children are well supported to move through their primary years.

- You are committed to ensuring that young people are well prepared for leaving you at the age of 18 or 19. Your communication passports link closely to each pupil's education, health and care plan (EHCP). This ensures that children and pupils are given support throughout their time with you, so that by the time they reach the sixth form, older students make appropriate post-18 choices about education, training or employment. As a result, almost all students go on to appropriate post-18 destinations.
- As part of this inspection, we also reviewed the attendance of pupils. This is because published information shows that the attendance of pupils has become worse over the last three years and that persistent absence increased last year.
- The school has appropriate systems to record and check on those pupils who are absent. In particular, there are some strong examples of your effective work with individual pupils and their families to improve attendance, especially where pupils spend long periods in hospital. You acknowledge that leaders do not have a strong enough overview of the attendance of pupils year on year, nor of their impact on improving attendance.
- During this inspection, we reviewed the leadership of pupils' personal development, behaviour and safety in more detail. This is because, although most of the 94 staff who completed Ofsted's staff survey were positive in their responses, there were a significant minority who raised a number of concerns about pupils' behaviour and safety. We agreed that some leaders are not consistently embedding your vision for the school in these areas.
- In addition to the checks that inspectors made on safeguarding referred to earlier, inspectors also reviewed the fire evacuation procedures, the first aid and medical training and logs, and the accident log. These are being maintained appropriately, and there is an appropriate level of training and understanding for those involved in these checks.
- Pupils are well cared for as individuals in the school. Most staff and leaders know pupils and their families well. They ensure that pupils are happy, well looked after and well taught throughout the day. Most staff use effective strategies to support the significant and complex behavioural and medical needs of pupils in the school.
- Pupils arrive at the school having a range of complex needs. Many pupils arrive demonstrating extremely challenging behaviours. While you deal with most of these effectively, a significant minority of staff do not feel confident in meeting the complex needs of pupils.
- When reviewing behaviour records, you acknowledged that, while leaders are aware of incidents, they are not consistently identifying where more effective action is needed. For example, behaviour records are not being reviewed routinely to see whether they are detailed enough, or whether further training and support are required for staff and pupils. Although behaviour support plans are reviewed, the record-keeping does not reflect this accurately. On occasion, leaders are not using all of the evidence available to support those pupils who have the most challenging behavioural needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they define the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers, so as to develop greater capacity to support you in your drive to raise standards in the school
- they improve the quality of strategic planning so that leaders can pinpoint exactly what they need to do next, and can accurately measure the impact of their work, especially but not exclusively, in behaviour and attendance
- they identify the training and support needs of all staff, so that they feel well supported to deal with challenging behaviours
- reviews of behaviour support plans draw on all available evidence and are accurately recorded.

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

Yours sincerely

Fyfe Johnston
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, leaders, managers and a group of staff. We also met with a group of governors and a school effectiveness partner from the local authority. We observed pupils learning in different lessons throughout the school. This was done jointly with you or other senior leaders. We looked at work in lessons. We observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school. We spoke with pupils informally and met with a representative group from both the school and college phases. We reviewed a wide range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, administration and your monitoring of teaching and learning. Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and development plans. We also considered 45 responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and free-text responses. Inspectors also considered 94 staff responses from those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.