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Miss Lucinda Duffy
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Duffy

Short inspection of Fox Wood Special School

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 2018 with Amanda Stringer HMI, 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 May 2014.

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.

Since joining the school as headteacher, you and your leadership team have worked successfully to create a culture of positive attitudes to learning across the school. Your drive and enthusiasm have resulted in a school where every child can succeed. Since the last inspection, leaders have developed a curriculum that prepares pupils very well for the next stages in their learning and development physically, socially, emotionally and academically. Your belief that all pupils can make significant progress is shared by the whole school community.

From the moment a pupil arrives at Fox Wood, staff focus on developing their communication skills and independence. Staff are creative and use a variety of resources very successfully to support pupils' speech, language and non-verbal communication. The impact of this work is illustrated by the typical parental comment, 'My child was non-verbal, and the school has given him a voice.'

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that leaders improve learning for the most able pupils in mathematics. This issue has been addressed. Staff now

give the most able pupils greater challenge with their reading, writing and mathematics work. School information shows that these pupils now make strong progress across subjects including mathematics.

Staff skilfully support pupils who fall behind in their learning. For example, a number of pupils who were falling behind with the development of their writing have been supported to make the accelerated progress needed to get back on track. There are now no discernible differences in the progress of different groups in school. Staff now capture the important small steps of progress made by pupils in different subjects in the lower and upper school. This ensures that leaders have a precise understanding of pupils' learning and progress in the main school. Furthermore, staff share this information, including visual images of pupils' learning, with parents. However, arrangements to review the progress of students through the school's own assessment system are not as well developed in the sixth form.

Leaders, managers and all staff have created a caring, warm and welcoming school. Pupils are thriving. They enjoy being in school and learning with their friends. One parent commented, 'From the caretaker who greets the children each day, each and every member of staff is a shining light.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff understand all procedures and have up-to-date training to identify any signs of abuse or neglect. Staff know the children and families well. Parents trust the staff and know that their children are happy and safe in school.

Leaders and staff have worked successfully to ensure that pupils are punctual and attend regularly. The appointment of a pastoral leader and the improved support offered to families has had a significant impact on improving pupils' attendance.

The school offers workshops for parents and carers on topics such as developing routines, encouraging healthy sleeping patterns and managing behaviour. Your team consults with families to establish where they would like additional support. Parents said that they really appreciate everything the school does for them and their children. They feel well supported in understanding their children's special educational needs and learning how to support them at home.

Inspection findings

- One of the areas that I considered was how well pupils make progress from their starting points. Pupils enter school with skills and knowledge well below those typical for their age. However, the high expectations of leaders and staff, the creative organisation of the curriculum and skilled teaching enable pupils to make strong progress across subjects. Pupils develop many essential skills around self-help, independence and communication. Leaders and staff have a clear vision that each pupil will become as independent as they possibly can. Students' outcomes

by the end of their time at Fox Wood are excellent. Many students in the sixth form and pupils in the main school gain accreditation in English and mathematics, as well as on vocational and personal development courses. Last year, 12 students in the sixth form gained a Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and five pupils gained a Silver Award.

- Teachers provide activities that engage pupils well. For example, during the inspection, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were listening to the story of 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', singing songs and counting 'golden tickets'. From the early years, right through to the sixth form, leaders and staff focus strongly on improving pupils' numeracy and literacy skills. This work is resulting in a marked improvement in the progress of pupils and students across a range of subjects. Leaders and staff keep a close check on the progress of pupils and students. They use information well to improve teaching. Even so, the arrangements to review students' progress in the sixth form are not as well developed as in the rest of the school.
- Leaders in the early years work very closely with pre-school settings and families to make sure that children settle quickly into their new school. Staff's observations of children's play, and their meetings with parents, families and professionals are all used to identify accurately the next steps in children's learning. This work is helping teachers to provide pupils with activities that are well matched to their needs and securing strong progress over time.
- Another line of enquiry was to look at how successfully leaders work with the local authority to make sure that pupils are fully supported through their education, health and care (EHC) plans. The school's work with the local authority to establish effective EHC plans is contributing strongly to the impressive progress that pupils of all ages make while they are at Fox Wood. Parents can see evidence of this progress in the photographic records that staff collect of each pupil's learning.
- Leaders have maintained the broad curriculum in the sixth form that inspectors noted at the previous inspection. As a result, students in the sixth form college are thriving. Students benefit from a wide range of vocational options, including the study of horticulture, catering, administration and retail. The on-site café gives students the confidence to serve customers and handle money. Students explained that they had grown vegetables, including onions and carrots, that were used to make soup in the kitchen. Some students, who complete work experience off-site, have learned to travel independently to and from their placements. During their time at Fox Wood, students are prepared well for the next stage of their lives. For example, as one student confidently explained, 'You need three things to get a job: qualifications, work experience and skills.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders and staff make even better use of the school's online assessment tool to review students' learning and personal development in the sixth form.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Bather
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders. An inspector met with six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. Inspectors held a meeting with a representative from Warrington local authority. Inspectors met with the school's leader for safeguarding and scrutinised safeguarding records, including the single central record. Inspectors observed pupils' and students' activities and reviewed evidence of pupils' progress with leaders and staff. Inspectors considered 51 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, but inspectors spoke with staff during the day. Inspectors met with a small group of staff, including teaching and support staff. Inspectors spoke with and communicated with pupils during lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. Inspectors met with the student council, where pupils communicated verbally and non-verbally by using pictures, symbols, eye contact and communication buttons. Inspectors observed pupils' and students' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. Inspectors considered a range of documents, including information about pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, records of pupils' attendance and information relating to the work of the governing body.