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Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of Springhead School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018 with Patricia Head, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are an experienced, dedicated and caring leader who has worked determinedly over many years to create a school community that puts the needs of every child and their family at the centre of the school's work. As a result, you, and the school, are held in very high regard by parents, staff, community partners and the local authority. Through your determined leadership, and the strong and effective support of your deputy headteachers, you have created a school community where teachers and teaching assistants work well together.

You describe the importance of engagement as the first step to overcoming a pupil's barriers to learning. This approach was clearly evident in our classroom visits, where staff organised learning activities to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of special educational needs. Pupils are engaged, make progress and achieve strong outcomes in literacy, numeracy and personal and social independence as a result of the well-planned curriculum, and because staff know pupils well. There is an emphasis on the personalisation of learning and individual target-setting, with teachers using the information in each pupil's education, health and care plan to set short-term learning objectives. Pupils' success in achieving their learning objectives is evident in teachers' planning and record-keeping. As a result of detailed assessments, teaching is pitched at a level that meets the needs of pupils with different starting points. Communication is at the centre of the curriculum and pupils and staff use symbol systems and signing to communicate. Symbols and objects of reference are used extensively to make class routines, school signs and other information accessible to pupils with delayed communication skills.

In response to the significant pressures on the school's accommodation and the increasing number of pupils on roll, particularly in the post-16 department, you and senior leaders have been resourceful in your organisation of the school. The recent move of the school's post-16 provision to another building, some two miles from the main school site, has enabled the deputy headteacher for post-16 to create a curriculum and ethos that effectively prepares students for life after school, and continuing education, employment and training. This was evident in the breadth of the curriculum, the range of accreditation achieved by students, numerous enterprise activities and the opportunities for independent travel training and learning in the local community.

Similarly, a group of five younger pupils with the most complex needs are based in the 'learning zone', a spacious and well-resourced classroom located in a community centre near the main school site. The staff in this class work very effectively as a team, successfully integrating therapy programmes into each pupil's timetable. The pupils respond well to the structured environment, the personalised learning programmes and the individual staff support. Staff know the pupils well, and the teacher's detailed planning and achievement records evidence that pupils make strong progress from their different starting points.

You understand that, as the school is located across three sites, it is important to maintain the school's vision and values and ensure that policies and procedures are carried out consistently. To achieve this, you have structured your senior leadership team so that the main school site and the post-16 department each have a deputy headteacher, and you ensure that you visit each of the sites regularly; for example, holding staff meetings in turn on each site. There are plans to bring the group of pupils with the most complex needs back to the main school site as soon as resources are available to develop the building. The local authority understands the challenges that you and leaders face and values your endeavours to find solutions that enable the school to continue to develop and succeed.

Under your dedicated leadership, the school makes a significant contribution, both locally and across the region, to the professional development of staff working with pupils who have special educational needs. Springhead School is a specialist school for cognition and learning. The school was selected by the government to be the lead school in the northern region, working with six other special schools, to pilot the seven aspects of the engagement assessment tool, resulting from the Rochford Review. The school is a strategic partner in the Scarborough Teaching Alliance, providing professional development and training placements for trainee teachers and support staff. The local authority holds you, and the school, in high regard. As a result, the local authority has used your substantial experience as a senior leader to support newly appointed special school headteachers.

You and senior leaders have reviewed the range of assessment systems used by teachers. The result of this review is that the school's paper-based assessment system has recently been replaced with an online assessment and progress tracking system. At the time of inspection, staff have been using the new system for a little more than a term. Teachers have completed baseline assessment information and

are rapidly bringing the details of pupils' formative achievements up to date. You have used the flexibility of the new system to describe key steps in learning and to respond positively to the changes in assessment arrangements for pupils who have special educational needs. Although the new assessment system needs to be fully embedded, leaders are using the information collected effectively to analyse the progress of individuals and groups of pupils.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school. There is a strong culture of mutual respect and community throughout the school. This is evidenced by pupils' well-mannered behaviour and their concern for one another, in lessons and when moving about the school. Inspectors observed pupils helping one another in lessons and at lunchtime. Members of the school council spoke confidently and positively about their favourite lessons, and their delight about school visits and taking part in sports activities. Pupils with challenging behaviour are supported effectively by staff who use sensitive and well-designed behaviour management strategies. As a result, pupils learn to behave appropriately, and they engage successfully in learning activities.

Staff report that they are happy and proud to work at Springhead School. The majority of the staff who completed the online staff survey worked at the school at the time of the previous inspection, and report that the school has continued to improve. Staff say that pupils are safe, that there are high expectations of pupils and that pupils' behaviour is well managed and that bullying is dealt with effectively. Staff report that the school is well led and managed, that staff are well supported by senior leaders and that professional development is used to challenge and support staff. Staff say that they are treated fairly, with respect and that leaders are interested in their well-being.

Governors have established close links with the school and visit regularly to meet staff, pupils and parents. The experienced chair of the governing body provides strong leadership and has worked effectively with other governors to create a successful working relationship with you and senior leaders. Governors highly value your dedicated leadership and commitment to the school. They are confident to challenge you and senior leaders. The chair of the governing body reported that governors have asked for information to be returned in a different format when they don't understand it. Governors receive regular reports from senior leaders, they evaluate the school's performance and identify development priorities. An examination of the record of governors' meetings demonstrates that they hold you and other senior leaders to account. Governors attend regular training and have recently carried out an audit of their skills. As a result, at the time of the inspection, governors had identified new members with specific skills to enhance their work and improve their impact. Governors were able to describe how additional funding has been used; however, they were unsure about the impact on pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a strong and effective safeguarding culture where pupils' safety and well-being have a high priority and are promoted through effective multi-

agency working. You have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, policies are reviewed regularly, and that records are detailed and of high quality. There are strong relationships between pupils and staff and, as a result, pupils say they feel safe and know that they can talk to a member of staff if they are worried about anything. The arrangements for pupils arriving at and leaving the school site are well managed and the risk assessments for school visits are clear and comprehensive.

You have developed a strong culture where staff work in partnership with families and a wide range of professionals and services to support each child's and young person's health, well-being and educational achievement. Staff and governors are knowledgeable as a result of regular safeguarding training and your strong and determined leadership as the designated safeguarding lead. Parents agree that their children are safe in school and are well looked after. The parents who spoke to inspectors, and all those who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were positive about the school's effectiveness. The comment of one parent was typical of many, when they said, 'a remarkable school with inspirational and amazing staff who all have the best interests of their pupils at the heart of everything they do'.

Inspection findings

- First, I wanted to check how well you have tackled the area for improvement identified at the last inspection. This was to 'successfully implement the improvements being planned to improve the English and mathematics ability of students, to ensure attainment rises still further by the end of the sixth form in these subjects'. You have successfully tackled this area for improvement. Monitoring reports prepared by the leaders for English and mathematics record that, since the last inspection, pupils' progress in these subjects has continued to improve across the school. Building upon pupils' achievements in key stage 4, a review of the post-16 curriculum resulted in the development of a wider range of accredited courses, including courses in English and mathematics. By the time that they leave school, all post-16 students have achieved accreditation for their learning and move successfully to post-school provision.
- Then, I wanted to check how effective the curriculum is in developing pupils' key skill and in preparing them for life after school. There is a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills throughout the school. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence and self-help skills. Pupils with delayed communication skills are supported through the use of signing, symbols and objects of reference. The establishment of a separate post-16 department, the development of a life skills curriculum, and the introduction of a wider range of accredited courses together effectively prepare students for adulthood. As a result of this successful development, pupils who have special educational needs from local mainstream schools join the sixth form to continue their education. Parents value the sixth form, the emphasis on life skills and the detailed transition planning that helps their son or daughter prepare for the next steps after school.
- I also wanted to check what action leaders have taken to ensure that the quality of teaching, and pupils' outcomes are consistently good or better across all key

stages and subjects. Leaders carry out regular formal lessons observations and informal 'drop-ins'. Inspectors examined anonymised reports for a number of classroom visits and saw detailed evidence of clear, quality assurance processes. Strengths and areas for development were clearly identified in each report: leaders identified common areas for development, and these were included in the school's professional development training programme. I saw evidence of leaders taking prompt and decisive action when they had concerns about the quality of teaching. Leaders have recently changed the school's assessment system, moving from paper records to an online system. Although this change is still being introduced, leaders were able to demonstrate that they are using the information collected to check that individuals and groups of pupils continue to make strong progress.

- Next, I wanted to understand how leaders have used additional funding – pupil premium, sports premium and Year 7 catch-up funding – to improve pupils' outcomes. You were able to describe the use of additional funding to improve the curriculum and the opportunities for pupils. For example, pupil premium funding is used to provide additional support from an educational psychologist. This has enabled the school to respond promptly when you have concerns about a child's learning or behaviour. Pupil premium funding had also been used to employ a family liaison worker; parents said that they value this support. Sports premium funding has been used for staff training and to develop a water skills programme for pupils with complex needs. However, you were unable to describe the precise impact that these initiatives have had on pupils' outcomes.
- Finally, I was interested to know about the work of the governing body and how they worked with school leaders. Governors know the school very well, they evaluate the school's performance and, working with you, they have identified areas for development. Governors visit school regularly and have established close and effective links with you and senior leaders. Governors reflect upon their work and, led by the experienced chair of the governing body, they have reviewed their skills and have recruited new members to improve their effectiveness. Although governors were aware of how additional funding was used, they were unable to describe the precise impact that this had on pupils' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recently introduced assessment system is quickly embedded, and that leaders analyse the information collected to check that all pupils continue to make strong progress
- they evaluate the impact of additional funding in greater detail and use the results to further improve pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

George Gilmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. Meetings were also held separately with six parents, and five governors. I met with the local authority's lead adviser for special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors visited lessons with senior leaders and looked at work in pupils' books and spoke to pupils about their learning. This included visits to the lessons in the separate post-16 department, and the 'rainbow' class for younger pupils with profound and complex needs. An inspector spoke to a group of pupils from the school council. We spoke to pupils during visits to lessons and at lunchtime.

Inspectors examined a range of school documents, including information about pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation report, the school improvement plan, behaviour and attendance records, information about safeguarding, and the records of governing body meetings. Inspectors took account of 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well 35 staff responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.