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Mrs L Slinger OBE
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Slinger

Short inspection of Forest Way School

Following my visit to the school with Tracey Ydlibi, Ofsted Inspector, on 11 May 2016, 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You continue to demonstrate inspirational leadership and have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school.

Since the previous inspection, significant changes have taken place. In 2011, you spearheaded the formation of the Forest Way Teaching School Alliance and in 2012 the school converted to become an academy. You are relentless in your determination to improve outcomes for pupils nationally and across the region, while also ensuring that your own school continues to flourish. In 2013, you restructured the leadership team which has helped to secure these continual improvements.

A sense of intense warmth and community pervades the school and parents and carers are eager to express the high regard and affection that they feel towards leaders and staff. The number of staff employed at the school has increased significantly over the last six years. A very high proportion of the staff have been in post for several years or more and the turnover of staff is low. This is testament to the way in which leaders value the work of all adults. It also reflects the commitment, pride and loyalty that staff feel towards the school.

Pupils have trusting and positive relationships with adults and a busyness and enjoyment of learning is evident across all aspects of the three to 19 provision. The vast majority of pupils behave exceptionally well. They are polite, calm and respectful of one another.

The teaching continues to be outstanding and, as a result, the progress of the pupils in each key stage continues to be strong. Since the previous inspection, you have opened The Croft bungalow, which provides opportunities for the post-16 students to develop greater independence and confidence in daily living skills.

All of the leaders are determined to seek excellence in everything the school does. Consequently, your planning for school improvement places a strong emphasis on regular and frequent training opportunities for all of the staff.

You refuse to accept anything less than the very best from any member of the Forest Way team, and have the most exacting standards of yourself. The pupils, parents and staff are very proud of their school and were eager to talk to inspectors and champion its many strengths. The award-winning school premises are maintained exceptionally well and used to their full potential to support a broad range of learning experiences for pupils of all abilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

You model the highest possible expectations for all aspects of the pupils' care and well-being and ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective. You have sustained a culture in the school in which the safety and welfare of the pupils and their families is of paramount importance to all. The designated leader with responsibility for safeguarding is passionate about this aspect of her work and highly skilled. She continually goes above and beyond her official duties to ensure that families receive the support they need. Two other senior leaders are developing expertise and knowledge to ensure that the current quality of support is maintained.

The governor with responsibility for safeguarding brings a wealth of professional experience and insight to this role. She visits the school regularly and ensures that she has an up-to-date view of current practice and that agreed safeguarding protocols are being followed.

Rigorous procedures are in place to ensure that the needs of pupils with complex medical needs are met. The procedures are implemented with an exemplary level of sensitivity and skill by all adults involved and demonstrate highly effective partnership working between staff from a broad range of professional backgrounds.

Inspection findings

- The senior staff have a strong daily presence in classrooms, know the individual needs of all of the pupils and have a clear view of the strengths of each member of staff. This is particularly impressive, given the size and complexity of the school site. As a result, they have a clear view of the quality of teaching and of the progress that pupils are making.
- The governors have exceedingly high expectations of themselves and make it very clear that nothing less than the very best is acceptable for the pupils and families at Forest Way School. Attendance at meetings is good and the governors visit the school regularly. Consequently, they are able to monitor

the impact of leaders' actions and ensure that standards at the school remain high.

- The governors are committed to continual improvement. Systems for self-evaluation are robust and include the use of external consultants to review the effectiveness of the school's work. Records of meetings show that the governors ask questions frequently and have the confidence and professional understanding to challenge leaders effectively. As a result, governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths as well as what needs to be done next.
- Staff work well together and morale is high. Responses from the 55 staff who completed the inspection questionnaire reflect the shared view that the school continues to get ever better. For example, as one member of staff stated, 'The school was outstanding at the last inspection but despite this we have tried not to rest on our laurels and continue our relentless drive for improvement'.
- Teachers and teaching assistants were keen to tell inspectors about the positive impact of the school's new approach to the delivery of behaviour management training. A group of school staff are now qualified to deliver the training in-house to colleagues. Consequently, staff are more confident in following the school's agreed approaches and know there are always colleagues available to offer guidance if needed. The staff also say that the weekly updates in morning staff meetings about the school's agreed signing systems help them to extend their vocabulary of signs and in doing so, communicate with pupils more effectively.
- The local authority holds the work of the school in great esteem. It particularly values the powerful work of the headteacher in bringing about significant improvement in other schools, through her leadership of the Forest Way Teaching School Alliance.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors, or who completed the inspection survey, were very positive about the work of the school. They say that the 'door is always open', that they can phone the school at any time and that there is always someone who will have time to talk to them. Typical comments included, 'Superb school – our son has made brilliant progress here', 'The staff are knowledgeable, kind, dedicated, patient and work well in partnership with parents'. This reflects the exceptionally strong relationships between school staff and families and contributes to the feeling of community which exists across the school.
- Leaders and staff employ an impressive range of different strategies to communicate regularly with all families. These include home-school diaries, home visits, and helping parents with transport arrangements so that they can attend review meetings and school events.
- All teachers assess pupils' learning on a daily and weekly basis and pupils' targets are reviewed and updated regularly. As a result, progress for pupils across the school remains strong.
- The leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics are proud of the creative ways in which pupils of all ages are encouraged to develop a love of literacy and numeracy throughout their time at the school. Work in pupils'

books and learning journeys, as well as in the school's tracking information, shows that pupils make good or better progress, often from exceptionally low starting points.

- Information for 2014/15 indicates that the pupils who are eligible for free school meals made better progress than other pupils in English and mathematics. It also shows that the pupils' writing improved across the school.
- The leaders, quite rightly, prioritise the development of the pupils' communication skills as a prime function of the school. The staff's exemplary skills in this area of work are supported by the successful partnerships it maintains with a wide range of specialist teaching and therapy services.
- The leaders do not ensure that trends in the pupils' progress and attainment in all subjects and areas of learning are reported clearly, over time. That is because new electronic systems for tracking and analysing those things are not embedded. Nevertheless, the leaders do provide the governors with a detailed annual report which outlines what they do know about the achievement of different groups of pupils.
- The leadership of the early years has remained strong since the last inspection. The children enjoy their learning and the strong focus on the development of communication skills enables them to express their needs, to develop self-confidence and to begin to form positive relationships with adults and with other children.
- The early years leader has a sound knowledge of the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. She ensures that the Reception year children in each of the mixed-year classes access a broad range of exciting sensory and play activities both inside and outside. As a result, children make good progress and enjoy their learning.
- Children with profound learning difficulties and complex medical needs are successfully and safely included in the rich play-based classroom environments.
- The post-16 curriculum is broad and wholly appropriate to the needs of the students at this school. The students are engaged in and highly enthusiastic about their learning. They make excellent progress because the staff have detailed knowledge of their needs and match programmes of study and work placement experiences to those needs appropriately.
- The curriculum focuses strongly on the development of skills to promote independence and self-confidence. These skills are promoted through a range of activities including the running of the daily sweet shop in the school, cook and eat sessions and the opportunity to take on the role of sports leaders.
- All students move on to further education, employment or training.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have opened the new bungalow provision, 'The Croft', to develop a life-skills based curriculum for post-16 students. The Croft is already beginning to have a significant impact on the development of social skills for the students and has revealed a need to develop wider social activities to reduce the sense of social isolation which some students show that they feel.

- The leaders take great care to track the attendance of different groups of pupils and continually go the extra mile to make sure that pupils' medical needs are addressed in school, if at all possible, so that disruption to the pupils' learning is minimal.

Next steps for the school:

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- systems for tracking pupils' achievement are refined so that leaders report clearly about trends in performance over time, in all subjects and areas of learning, for all groups
- they extend aspects of the provision for post-16 students to reduce the sense of social isolation which some students experience.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Cossor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteachers, other leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. We met with a number of parents at the start of the day and took account of the school's own parent questionnaire, the 55 responses received during the inspection and the 17 entries on Parent View. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and carried out joint observations with you and other leaders. We also met with a group of teachers and a group of teaching assistants and attended a student council meeting. We considered a range of documentation including records of pupils' progress, and safeguarding policies and logs.