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3 September 2019

Mrs Kim Rickford  
Headteacher  
The Forum Centre  
Park Road  
Blandford Forum  
Dorset  
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Dear Mrs Rickford

### **Short inspection of The Forum Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 16 July 2019 with Ofsted Inspector Gill Hickling, 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 second short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in January 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

There has been a significant change since that inspection. The local authority has asked you to extend your provision to integrate pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. You have achieved this successfully. There are now 16 places in your school allocated to pupils with SEMH needs. You and your leadership team have worked with your staff team to integrate these new pupils into your warm, caring school. This new development has not affected the good work your school does to meet the needs of all your pupils.

You, your senior leaders and governors know your school very well. You have an accurate view of its strengths and priorities for development. You share a vision for the school. Your school development plan sets out clearly the steps you plan to take to achieve your goals.

You make sure that the best interests of pupils are at the heart of your work. You and your colleagues continually look for ways in which you can refine and improve what you offer your pupils and their families. This focused approach has helped you to respond successfully to the changing profile of pupils who attend your school. There is a strong emphasis on gaining a clear understanding of the underlying needs of your pupils. You and your team make getting to know new pupils and their families a priority. Consequently, most of your pupils settle in quickly and re-engage with learning.

Parents and carers value the support they receive from staff at your school. They recognise the difference being at The Forum Centre makes to their children. Parents spoken to during the inspection explained that their children had had negative educational experiences at other schools. The parents all felt that their children had been nurtured and supported by your staff. This support has improved their children's learning and, in many cases, improved relationships at home.

Staff enjoy working at The Forum Centre. They appreciate the high-quality training they receive. Staff spoken to during the inspection recognised the positive impact of training. They feel well equipped to work with pupils with more challenging needs. Staff feel well supported by leaders.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked you to ensure that the quality of teaching in the secondary phase matched that in your primary classes. You have taken action to share good practice across the school. There are now clear similarities in approach in all classes. Carefully planned lessons meet pupils' individual needs. Skilful use of questioning encourages pupils to think about their learning. Effectively deployed support staff encourage pupils to develop independent study skills. As a result of high-quality teaching across the school, all pupils are making progress.

You were also asked to work with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that pupils have access to specialist services. The extension of your school to include 16 places for pupils with SEMH needs is the result of this work. These pupils are well supported by staff with the right skills to meet their needs. This support has resulted in the successful inclusion of the new pupils into all aspects of school life. The building work currently under way is further evidence of your commitment to these pupils. Extra rooms are being added to your school to extend the service provided to pupils and their families. You have also developed links with external agencies to provide further specialist support for pupils with the most complex needs.

A final area for improvement was to change your funding system to enable leaders to plan more strategically. You have recruited governors with expertise in school funding. These new governors have played a significant role in working with the local authority to develop systems that support strategic planning. Planning for the future is now more directly linked to available funding. The extension to your school's building is evidence that this is effective.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders use outside agencies to ensure that safeguarding procedures remain up to date. A governor has regular meetings with the safeguarding lead. He keeps the governing body informed about safeguarding in the school.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at the school. The leadership team is diligent in its recording of reported concerns. Swift action is taken when necessary. Leaders continue to build positive relationships with outside agencies. Staff are clear about how to report

concerns. They receive appropriate training and understand their roles in keeping pupils safe from harm, including from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Communication with parents is good. The school works closely with, and is supportive of, parents and their children. Parents are kept up to date with all aspects of their children's progress and well-being.

Staff use de-escalation processes effectively when needed. They are proactive in their approach to ensure that they minimise situations that trigger inappropriate behaviour.

Pupils report that they feel safe at school and like attending. They feel the staff are 'easy to talk to' and support them well. Pupils do not feel that bullying is an issue.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on several lines of enquiry. The first of these was the attendance of pupils. Attendance has improved over the last three years and is now higher than the national average for similar schools. However, you are determined to continue to improve attendance so that it meets the average for all schools in England.
- We found that staff work hard to challenge poor attendance. You know the reasons for pupils' absence. Strong relationships between staff and pupils' families enable staff to challenge these reasons when appropriate. The result is often improved attendance. With older pupils, staff stress the importance of good attendance in the workplace. This helps pupils recognise the link between developing good habits at school and their employability. This link is further reinforced by strict adherence to the school's policy on punctuality. Although this approach has a negative impact on whole-school attendance figures, it is evidence of the importance placed on developing good habits while at school.
- My second line of enquiry looked at behaviour management. I wanted to find out how effectively training equipped staff to manage challenging behaviour. You consulted staff with regards to the development of the SEMH provision. Leaders checked how confident staff felt in managing challenging behaviour. Staff confidence increased as a result of carefully focused training. Staff refined their skills to manage challenging behaviour effectively. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in behaviour records. The number of serious incidents has declined. The number of fixed-term exclusions has also declined. This is despite the number of pupils increasing, along with the complexity of their needs.
- You place a strong emphasis on understanding the reasons behind challenging behaviour. Staff work with a range of specialists to develop a clear understanding of each pupil's needs. The close relationships staff have with pupils' families help deepen this understanding. Your staff have developed a consistent approach to rewarding pupils' positive behaviour. Staff provide pupils with very clear guidelines about acceptable behaviour. Staff develop respectful working relationships with pupils. There is a high degree of respect between pupils and staff. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good.
- My final line of enquiry focused on how well you prepare pupils for moving on from The Forum Centre. For some pupils, this means returning to a mainstream school. For

others, it is leaving at the end of key stage 4. The design of the curriculum is flexible. It meets the needs of individual pupils. This ensures that, when they come to your school with gaps in their learning, these are addressed. This helps to prepare them for leaving, whether back to mainstream education or at the end of key stage 4.

- Those pupils moving back to mainstream schools are well prepared. Staff from their new school meet them at The Forum Centre. Your staff share ideas and strategies that will support the pupil at their new school. Staff from your school support the pupil at their new school as required. Parents and staff from mainstream schools told us how effective this approach is.
- The curriculum gives pupils opportunities to gain academic qualifications. It also offers pupils the chance to experience work-related learning through vocational courses. At present, there are limited opportunities for pupils to work with employers and extend their experience in the world of work.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- continue to work to improve attendance so that it is in line with the national average
- embed more work-related activities in the curriculum so that pupils gain a wider view of the world of work.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Burgess  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We met with you, senior leaders, teaching staff and support staff. One inspector met with the chair and five members of the governing body. We considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. One inspector spoke to six parents in person and on the telephone. One inspector met formally with a group of staff. We talked formally and informally to pupils throughout the school day. We spent time in classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at pupils' work in books and on walls. We looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and action plan, as well as a range of other documentation. We conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training records, recruitment checks and record-keeping.