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Mr Jason Thurley
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Dear Mr Thurley

Short inspection of Beacon Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 2019 with Michael Cook, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2015.

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.**

The years following the predecessor school's previous inspection were a difficult period in the history of the school. There were changes of name and sponsor and pupil numbers declined. Indeed, there were concerns that the school might close. Wellspring Academy Trust started to work with the school in September 2017. Since then, supported by the trust, you have taken effective actions to address the issues which affected the school at the time. Your actions have clearly had a positive effect, but there are still issues to address in some important areas.

You are extremely inclusive in your approach and you have welcomed many pupils who, for a variety of reasons, have not succeeded in other secondary schools. The local authority speaks highly of the way you have given so many pupils from elsewhere another chance. The small number of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire were very positive about the school generally and, in particular, about your willingness to welcome pupils who have had difficulties. Pupils too are grateful for the opportunities you have offered them and one pupil summed it up by saying that you were the only school to let him 'have a future'. However, this approach brings its challenges and has had a negative effect on the school's attendance figures and on the number of pupils excluded from the school for a fixed term. Furthermore, the majority of the small cohort who left the

school at the end of Year 11 in 2018 had joined the school after time in other schools or out of mainstream education. Many of them did not manage to make up the ground they had missed.

Supported by the trust and working closely with the local authority, you have made recent changes to develop your strategies to improve the rate of pupils' attendance. There are encouraging signs of improvement during the current school year, both overall and in particular for disadvantaged pupils. However, despite leaders' undoubted hard work, overall, pupils' attendance continues to be consistently below the national average and has been so for a number of years. The percentage of pupils who are persistently absent has also been much higher than the national average.

During the inspection, the behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school was calm and purposeful. School leaders, governors and the trust pride themselves on the fact that they do not exclude pupils permanently from school. However, the percentage of pupils who are excluded from school for a fixed period has been consistently above the national average for several years. Leaders' information shows a reduction in the use of fixed-term exclusions during the 2017/18 academic year, but it is still above the national average.

Provisional outcomes information for pupils who took their GCSE examinations or equivalent in 2018 indicates that outcomes declined compared with those achieved by their peers in 2017. Overall, pupils' progress was still broadly average and their progress in option subjects was significantly above the national average. These subjects include sport studies, performing arts, health and social care and business studies. However, pupils' progress in English, mathematics and the humanities subjects of history and geography was significantly below the national average. Leaders indicated several factors have combined to contribute to this decline, including the curriculum which was in place when pupils made their choice of key stage 4 courses. Leaders have recently made revisions so that curriculum breadth and balance have been increased. The high number of pupils in this small cohort who had joined the school quite recently also had a negative effect on the school's overall progress figures.

The predecessor school's previous inspection report asked leaders to ensure that action was taken to improve the quality of senior and subject leaders' monitoring of pupils' progress. More rigorous systems are now in place and middle leaders are clear about their responsibilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture in the school that sets the safety of pupils as a high priority. Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leadership of this area is strong and there is a dedicated, well-trained team which supports vulnerable pupils. Staff in this team make referrals in a swift and timely

fashion. They show persistence and determination in the way that they ensure that pupils quickly get the help that they need. Records are detailed and of a high quality.

Due to the training and the regular updates that they receive, staff understand their responsibilities and are vigilant. Leaders work closely with the local authority and a wide range of external agencies in the community to ensure that appropriate action is being taken to keep the most vulnerable pupils safe. Governors are also well trained and regularly evaluate the leadership's evidence that the school's systems are fit for purpose. However, the present safeguarding policy lacks detail and does not reflect the meticulous approach of leaders to safeguarding issues.

Inspection findings

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Over time, teaching has not led to consistently good outcomes in the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects (English, mathematics, science, history and geography). Inspection activities showed that leaders' strategies are starting to have a positive effect. However, there are still inconsistencies.
- There is some very effective teaching which enables pupils to make gains in their learning from their starting points. For the last three years, pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 11 have made strong progress, considerably above the national average, in the 'open' suite of option subjects. These include sport studies, performing arts, health and social care and business studies. The school's own progress information shows that pupils' progress continues to be strong in these subjects. Comments from pupils during the inspection suggest that the fact that teachers know their pupils well, and tailor the teaching to the needs of each pupil, is an important factor in the success of these subjects.
- Pupils and staff talk positively about improvements in behaviour. Pupils like the atmosphere of the small school and appreciate the fact that leaders know them by name. They said that bullying was rare, and when it did occur, the school dealt with it promptly and effectively.
- Governors have the skills, knowledge and confidence to hold school leaders to account. Minutes of their meetings showed how they had challenged leaders on matters such as pupils' progress, attendance and the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further action is taken to improve rates of pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence
- continued action is taken to deal further with the causes of some pupils' behaviour which are resulting in the high rates of exclusion of pupils from school, so that the rates of exclusion continue to reduce

- the quality of teaching is consistently effective, so that outcomes across GCSE or equivalent qualifications improve, particularly in English, mathematics, science and the humanities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North East Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Pridding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I met with three governors (including the chair and vice-chair) and spoke by video link to the chief executive officer of the trust. I also met with a representative of the local authority. We met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and also spoke informally with them around the school. We met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, outcomes, attendance and behaviour.

We took part in joint visits to lessons with you and another senior leader. During these visits to lessons, we looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with pupils about what they were learning and their progress. We also visited lessons without senior leaders. We looked in detail at pupils' workbooks and folders in English and mathematics, with relevant middle leaders present.

I took into account results from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View (14 responses), including the 12 free-text responses. We also looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding records, behaviour and attendance records and governors' minutes. Pupil assessment and progress information, and other documents available on the school website were also considered.