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26 June 2015

Ms Dawn Coombes
Headteacher
Wakefield Pathways School
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West Yorkshire
WF10 3QJ

Dear Ms Coombes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wakefield Pathways School

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People, Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Take urgent steps to secure pupils' safety in all key stages, by:
 - improving the frequency and rigour of health and safety checks on the premises so that potential risks are swiftly identified and reported and urgent action taken to address them
 - providing staff training so that all staff are clear about what is needed to keep pupils safe both inside and outside the classroom
 - making sure that staff and leaders consistently refer to risk assessments, which identify the needs of each pupil when planning learning activities
 - improving the written records relating to safeguarding incidents so that they are clear and detailed enough and stored in a manner so that that can be used in order to prevent re-occurrence.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is at least good, in order to improve achievement in reading, writing and mathematics for all groups of pupils in all key stages, so that they can make good or better progress, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - ensuring that information about what pupils know and can do is used effectively to provide activities that challenge pupils of all abilities to reach their potential, especially the most able
 - providing training for staff so that the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics are taught consistently well in all classes
 - increasing opportunities in classrooms for pupils to practise and develop their reading skills and to encourage reading for pleasure
 - making sure that all teachers provide clear direction to teaching assistants and that they more actively support pupils' learning in the classroom
 - planning work which pupils find interesting and challenging in order to hold their attention and ensure that their behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently good
 - supporting pupils to become more inquisitive learners by extending the range of learning activities and improving the quality of resources and the learning environment.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that the school has the ability to improve quickly, by:
 - developing the roles of the assistant headteachers so they are fully involved and equipped with the skills they need to check the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, so that teaching and pupils' achievement improves at a faster rate
 - ensuring that governors have the skills and knowledge to hold senior leaders rigorously to account for quickly improving the quality of teaching and pupils'

achievement and, the school's work to ensure pupils are kept safe and secure is effective

- ensuring all staff share in the aspirational vision for the school's future and that staff are motivated to do so
- improving pupils' understanding of life in modern British society.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including seven lessons seen with the headteacher. She also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, the business manager, a member of the interim executive board (IEB), staff and representatives from the local authority. A telephone call was held with a consultant improvement partner.

Context

Two teachers left the school at the end of the spring term. A further five teachers, including the two assistant headteachers and a retiree, are due to leave the school at the end of this term. Informal consultation has just begun regarding amalgamation with an outstanding local special school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is rising, albeit unevenly, dependent on the quality of teaching. The headteacher set challenging progress targets for this year, both to raise aspirations for pupils' learning and to help make up the shortfalls in previous learning evident at the time of the section 5 inspection. More time has been dedicated to teaching basic skills so that pupils are better prepared for the next stage of their education.

A systematic approach to evaluating pupils' progress half termly, and putting strategies in place to increase this where necessary, has been established. The introduction is underway of a new electronic assessment system that will help staff to analyse pupils' progress in detail and evaluate it in a national context. Pupils' work is now recorded in books, often through photographs, so their progress can be captured. Teachers are now expected to annotate pupils' work frequently so that learning outcomes are evident and the next small steps pupils need to take are identified: when appropriate work is levelled. The headteacher recognises that more needs to be done to embed this firmly, but it is clear that this detailed approach is helping staff to plan progression in learning more effectively for each individual pupil.

Significant changes have been made to the school's approach to teaching literacy and developing pupils' communication skills. A daily phonics (the link between letters and sounds) session has been introduced at a common time across the school so that pupils can join a group that matches their stage of learning. This is helping to increase pupils' readiness to read and making the link with writing clearer. In tandem with this, the expectation that pupils will read with an adult every day has been set and daily records of their reading are kept. A reading corner in every classroom means that pupils have much greater access to books.

These strategies are paying dividends. The regular assessments in literacy, communication, mathematics and science show that, as a minimum, 70% of pupils in Years 2 to 6 are making at least the expected rate of progress from their varying starting points. Progress is strongest in listening where 90% of pupils have made at least expected progress in the last year. In Year 1, progress is slower in mathematics than in literacy. Although pupils' progress in their personal, social and emotional development is captured through assessments in this area of the curriculum, the school is at the early stages of introducing a more detailed approach to tracking these aspects of learning.

In the early years, children's progress is tracked using a detailed breakdown of what is expected for their age. In most areas of learning, children have made at least the expected rate of progress, in some cases reaching age-related expectations. Progress is weaker in writing and in their knowledge and understanding of the world.

The quality of teaching

Although not consistent across the school, there has been some improvement in the quality of teaching. This is evident in the school's monitoring records, progress tracking and in pupils' work books. Where teaching is not good enough, teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of are too low. Tasks set are repetitive in type and cover areas where pupils' learning is already secure. At times, resources are not chosen carefully enough, being either too simple or complex to engage pupils fully in learning. Teachers do not always ensure that resources provide accurate modelling of English grammar.

A common format for lesson planning has been established, together with the expectation that learning is planned for each pupil based on the next steps identified through regular assessments, noted above. In most classes, there is a growing link between annotations of pupils' learning and lesson planning. Where learning is good or better, teachers' expectations are consistently high and work is challenging and engaging for pupils. Well-targeted questioning promotes pupils' progress effectively. The management of pupils' behaviour is highly effective: well-established strategies ensure that lessons move forward smoothly, enabling pupils to enjoy activities and participate confidently. For instance, in a Year 6 music lesson pupils listened well to one another, followed instructions and took turns playing instruments.

In many instances, teaching assistants know pupils well and use effective strategies to help manage their behaviour and ensure they are ready to learn. They help pupils regulate their own behaviour so that learning can take place and in some cases run carefully balanced timetables for individual pupils. Where teachers communicate their expectations clearly, teaching assistants make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. However, not all teaching assistants are confident in the teaching of phonics.

Improvements have been made to the learning environment. Displays celebrating pupils' work and supporting their learning are attractive and engaging. In some instances, these provide a focal point for recall of exciting events, such as the recent outdoor pursuits residential for Year 6 pupils.

The learning environment in the early years has also improved, with the support of the local authority's early years team. More age-appropriate equipment is in place and adults are becoming more skilful in helping children to develop their own ideas and imaginations through interacting with it.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A range of appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that pupils are kept safe. All staff have received training on safeguarding as well as health and safety. All classes have risk assessments in place, both for regular and occasional activities. Pupils' individual behaviour plans include assessments of risks associated with their responses. During lesson observations, it was clear that staff know and employ strategies for diffusing risks and helping pupils to regulate their own behaviour. Supportive routines were observed and cues, such as phrases and actions, were used to good effect.

The business manager is assiduous in checking on health and safety and keeping abreast of minor repairs. He has introduced a detailed checklist to help identify and log any issues and conducts regular checks accompanied by the Chair of the IEB. Staff are encouraged to record 'near misses' so that preventative steps can be taken. These are decreasing in number as risks are addressed.

The school's records show that, overall, behaviour is improving. Leaders are in the throes of moving the analysis of behaviour incidents from a manual to an electronic system, which has the capability to analyse information quickly and in a range of ways. This is a positive move from a situation at the time of the section 5 inspection where incidents were logged but not analysed. Pupils' behaviour is categorised according to the level of risk they present to themselves and others. This is reviewed regularly as well as in the light of any particular incidents or information. The IEB receives regular reports on behaviour overall and on individual serious incidents, such as when a pupil or adult has been injured.

Attendance is a little below the school's target for this year, mainly as a consequence of some long term absences for extended visits abroad. The parent support worker checks on absences daily and supports some parents to get their child to school, including through liaison with other agencies.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school's performance and high expectations of staff and pupils. She has a firm grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is resolute in seeking to increase pupils' progress. Consequently, she has introduced a sharper focus on teaching basic skills and on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world. Systematic approaches to assessment, tracking pupils' achievement, logging behaviour and keeping pupils' safe have been established and are beginning to have a positive impact.

The headteacher's approach to improving teaching is unequivocally robust. She knows where and what improvement is needed because monitoring is frequent and detailed. Lesson observations, including by the school's consultant adviser and the executive headteacher, are triangulated with pupils' work. Lesson planning and pupils' work are monitored weekly by the lead teacher who provides helpful pointers for improvement, as well as identifying where good practice could be shared.

With the local authority and partner schools, a programme of weekly coaching was introduced for some staff in order to improve the quality of teaching rapidly. Good or better practitioners from other schools as well as Pathways contributed to this. Although the impact of the initial phase of coaching has been beneficial for some, this is not uniformly the case. Consequently, some coaching continues, although on a less intensive schedule.

Initial steps have been taken to develop the roles of the assistant headteachers. Expectations have been clarified and training provided. However, planned staffing changes mean the impact of this work is limited.

The IEB meets frequently and is thorough in marshalling the information needed to evaluate the school's progress. As a result, changes have been made to the headteacher's report so that this now includes data about serious behaviour incidents and details of any complaints. However, the reports are not sufficiently evaluative and do not highlight where key decisions are needed. IEB members visit the school frequently to check on progress first hand; one member contributed to a recent review led by the local authority. Meeting minutes show clearly where members have asked challenging questions of leaders and where decisions need to be actioned. IEB members are increasing opportunities for communication with parents, for instance at meetings and letters.

External support

The local authority's improvement officer effectively coordinates support from a wide range of sources. Although this is not all equally valued by the school, much has helped the school move forward. Staff value the support they receive from the local

authority on health and safety as well as from the early years team, the learning support team and the communication and interaction team. The local authority has employed a consultant adviser to the school who visits frequently and works successfully with leaders, for instance on monitoring the quality of teaching. The local authority has also commissioned an executive headteacher who has provided additional leadership capacity. The improvement officer has successfully drawn on support from other local schools to provide the coaching programme.

The local authority draws partners together to conduct robust termly reviews of the school's progress.