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Ms Dawn Coombes
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Coombes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wakefield Pathways School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 November 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 third 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 leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 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 improve 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 that 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 third monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including a number of lessons, some jointly with the headteacher and a member of the senior leadership team. She scrutinised documents, including some concerned with keeping pupils safe, and met with the headteacher, a member of the senior leadership team, the business manager, the parent support worker, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. She spoke by telephone to a consultant improvement partner.

Context

Five teachers, including one retiree, left at the end of the last academic year. A new member of the senior leadership team joined the school at the beginning of term. Another member of the senior leadership team is absent due to ill-health. Two long-term supply teachers and a member of the local authority's communication and interaction team are covering teacher vacancies and sickness absence. Informal consultation on amalgamation with an outstanding local special school has taken place and the next stage of the process is pending.

Outcomes for pupils

The headteacher is working hard to embed the helpful systems introduced last year to assess and track pupils' progress accurately. Further training has been provided for staff to ensure that assessments are correct and that teachers plan activities that help pupils take the next small steps in their learning. Challenging targets have been set for each pupil's progress. The starting points of children in the early years and new pupils have been evaluated. However, recruitment difficulties, that have resulted in the need for a number of temporary teachers in some classes, have slowed the development of the assessment systems overall. These staffing changes have also had an adverse impact on the progress of some pupils so improvements are uneven in this area of the school's work. Where staffing is stable and teachers' practice is improving, the increases in progress noted last term are being consolidated effectively.

As planned, the school has introduced regular evaluations of pupils' progress in their personal and social development. This will be monitored alongside their academic progress. There is increasing encouragement for parents to contribute to a rounded picture of pupils' development. For example, parents note successes at home, which might be linked to mealtimes or getting dressed independently, on the leaves of a large achievement tree displayed in the hall.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Visits to lessons during this inspection, alongside the school's own records, show that the improvements to teaching made last year have been sustained. The intensive coaching of a number of teachers paid dividends, which are now being built on, with the help of a less intensive mentoring programme. However, the need for a series of temporary teachers to cover some classes has restricted gains in the overall quality of teaching. The headteacher has taken sensible steps to manage the impact of temporary arrangements and very recently the local authority agreed to provide some help to stabilise staffing.

At the start of the academic year, the headteacher set out the approaches everybody must adopt for teaching, which were developed last year. Leaders monitor the quality of planning and pupils' work weekly, to secure consistency in use of the school's systems, such as the common planning format, and to improve learning. Feedback is constructive, identifying clearly what should be done to meet the school's requirements, and is followed up to check that improvements are made.

There were a number of strengths in the lessons observed. These included:

- engaging activities at the right level for individual pupils
- a balance of individual tasks linked to group activities to encourage pupils' awareness of one another and their capacity to relate
- good relationships and effective behaviour management, including by teaching assistants.

There were also some areas in need of development, such as:

- teachers' skills and understanding in teaching phonics (the links between letters and sounds)
- effective preparation of appropriate resources that support the intended learning
- asking key questions that are challenging enough and closely linked to the main point of the lesson.

Classroom environments are attractive, with improved use of displays to support and celebrate learning. There are more opportunities in classrooms for pupils to mark-make and write independently, supported by materials linked to the current topic, such as the Gunpowder Plot. During observations, it was evident that pupils enjoy looking at books in the reading corners introduced last year. Helpfully, a larger number of younger pupils have more opportunities to learn through play.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has improved: there has been a very significant decrease in the number of incidents this term compared with the same period last year, despite changes in staffing. High expectations and the consistent implementation of the

school's behaviour policy are having a positive impact. Pupils have a productive start to each day, taking part in physical activities both indoors and outdoors following their bus journeys. Pupils are being encouraged to be as independent as possible at lunchtimes, for instance in collecting and clearing their own meals.

Pupils are more involved in decisions about life at school this year. Each group has set their own class rules as well as agreeing on rewards. These reflect the age and preferences of classes. For instance, a group of boys in the early years has decided that their rewards should be linked to toy cars. The new school council has a representative from each class. Members are currently surveying everyone to find out what they like and do not like about school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher began the year with a collaborative session for staff, aimed at gaining a common vision for the school. The new senior leadership team made a promising start to moving the school forward in this agreed direction. However, unavoidably reduced leadership capacity plus recruitment difficulties have combined to decrease the initial momentum. Nonetheless, the drive to improve the quality of teaching through regular monitoring and mentoring is being sustained.

Following support from the amalgamation partner school, and a range of training for teachers, a new curriculum has been introduced that reflects new national requirements. In lessons observed, good links were made between topics and the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Pupils' social and cultural development is being supported well by a wide range of experiences that reflect fundamental British values. For example, pupils have learned about Remembrance Day and Guy Fawkes, are contributing to Children in Need and wrote and read their own harvest festival poems in a service at the local church.

Systems to keep pupils safe are well embedded. Regular checks are made on the safety of the building and equipment by the business manager and Chair of the IEB. Staff are alert to general and individual risks, as is evident from lesson plans. For example, they know which pupils are likely to put unsuitable things in their mouths and respond swiftly when required.

IEB members are frequent visitors to the school and are well informed about its performance, including the quality of teaching. They are appropriately involved in decisions about pay awards linked to performance management. Members attend local authority review meetings and participate in the termly 'Peer Challenge Review' days, enabling them to check information provided by the headteacher and ask challenging questions. The Chair has ensured that the views of staff are taken into account in the consultation on the proposed amalgamation.

External support

The local authority continues to coordinate help for the school, including identifying a local leader of education to support the headteacher. Officers provide regular formal reviews that challenge leaders robustly on progress towards the removal of special measures. Support regarding leadership capacity and recruitment has been harder to source. The local authority's communication and interaction team are stepping into the breach but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this. The local authority has also run training for teachers on the delivery of phonics, an area where more work is needed.

The headteacher has sought support from a number of local schools on various areas such as the school environment; this has had a positive impact.