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Arnet Donkin
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Dear Mr Donkin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

Following my visit with Steffi Penny, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 4– 5 July 2017, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016.

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's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016

- Leaders and governors must take urgent and immediate action to assure secure safeguarding and child protection arrangements throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that leaders responsible for safeguarding have the experience, knowledge and understanding to carry out their duties effectively
 - providing high-quality training for all staff to help them to identify risks to pupils and learners
 - installing a secure and reliable system for recording and referring concerns about pupils and learners
 - insisting that safeguarding procedures and practices are monitored closely,
 - regularly and in accordance with expected good practice
 - making sure that risk assessments and care plans are comprehensive, up to date and shared routinely with those who teach and care for pupils and learners
 - implementing stricter procedures to maintain site security.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
 - reviewing and evaluating the vision, values and purpose of the school so that they are relevant and clear to all
 - making certain that leaders, governors and staff at all levels are held to account for the school's performance through a rigorous review and appraisal process
 - ensuring that the concerns raised about staff's care and support of pupils and learners are thoroughly investigated and recorded systematically
 - implementing a clear communication policy, including a consistent approach to the use of British sign language (BSL)
 - establishing an effective system for assessing, measuring, tracking and evaluating the progress of pupils and learners
 - analysing information about pupils' behaviour in order to bring about improvements.
- Improve teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils and learners by:
 - making better use of assessment information to set targets and plan for their learning, particularly but not exclusively in the primary phase

- providing a more inspiring and orderly environment for primary-aged pupils
 - ensuring that the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, are stretched and challenged to achieve highly
 - focusing on improving the specialist college learners' communication and language skills, so that they are better equipped for their next steps and employment where appropriate.
- Ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools listed below.
 - Ensure that monitoring undertaken by managers, governors and the independent visitor is effective in evaluating the quality of the residential provision and identifies areas for improvement.
 - Ensure that staff receive good-quality supervision that leads directly to good progress for all pupils and learners.
 - 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 may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 4 July 2017 to 5 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, senior and middle leaders, administrative staff, a group of pupils, a parent and trustees of the school.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been some staff changes. The interim principal is now the permanent executive principal. An interim head of safeguarding was appointed in April 2017 prior to the substantive post being successfully secured. At the time of the inspection, a transition plan was in place to ensure that the risk to pupils was not compromised due to the change in safeguarding personnel. A new vice principal who will be responsible for the quality of teaching and learning has been appointed and will commence in post at the start of September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last inspection, trustees have successfully secured the leadership of the school. Your appointment and the impact of your work have been pivotal to driving forward the improvement priorities identified during that inspection. Since your appointment, you have wasted no time in pinpointing exactly what needs to be done. You have a no-nonsense approach. You do not shy away from tackling underperformance, resulting in improvements being made in the quality of care and education that pupils receive. You have very high expectations of yourself and your staff to provide pupils with the very best quality of education and care. Indeed, together with staff and trustees, you are determined to become a centre of excellence for deaf education.

At the time of the visit, you had finalised your leadership team in preparation for the start of the next academic year. You are fully aware of the importance of these appointments to continue the essential work required to further improve the school quickly. Your recruitment of suitable staff, carefully aligned with effective training, is strengthening leadership across all areas. For example, middle leaders have welcomed the training they have received in order to effectively undertake their roles and responsibilities to improve outcomes for pupils. They describe how they have increased confidence in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. They are positive and clearly demonstrate the energy and commitment to quickly drive forward the necessary improvements.

You, your leadership team and trustees are working effectively to tackle the key priorities quickly. This is building momentum as new appointments are made and changes begin to embed. Together, you have revisited the school's vision, values and purpose to ensure that they remain relevant. The school's core values of 'committed, respectful, ambitious, communicator, caring and positive' are well known and understood by staff and pupils. Staff share these values, which are clearly reflected in their work.

You are aware that the monitoring of leaders at all levels, including trustees, needs to be even more rigorous and robust to check that the actions taken to improve pupil achievement are having the necessary impact.

A review of governance took place in April 2017. Trustees have taken on board the recommended actions identified and as a result are now working more effectively. New appointments have brought increased expertise and knowledge to the body, especially in safeguarding. The school improvement plan is fit for purpose. It accurately reflects the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. Trustees use the information they have to hold you and senior leaders to account for improvement. However, the absence of specific milestones and measurable targets in the school's action plan makes it more difficult for trustees to monitor the school's work and challenge underperformance with the necessary rigour. Nevertheless, documentation indicates that trustees have a greater focus on pupil outcomes than previously and understand that this focus needs to be at the core of their work if the school is to rapidly improve.

The school commissioned a pupil premium review in May 2017. This showed that trustees are taking appropriate action to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Current progress information and the work produced by pupils' show that there is no discernible difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

A careful check of pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups, undertaken by the inspectors, confirms that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. There is a clearer focus by teachers to ensure that pupils build skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. For example, in mathematics younger pupils were learning to apply their understanding of subtraction by confidently answering questions posed by the teacher. However, improvements have not yet been sustained for long enough to ensure that pupils make consistently strong progress.

Staff use a range of communication tools to engage pupils. BSL is used consistently

across the school and staff have secure knowledge of the language. However, other modern technologies to support pupils' communication skills are less well developed. Consequently, this hampers pupils' communication and learning. Pupils are not yet consistently making the best possible progress, especially in their communication, writing and mathematics. Some pupils are not fully motivated in their learning because teachers do not ensure that their individual needs are met well enough or they are not appropriate to their age. In particular, those pupils identified as being more able are not given work that sufficiently excites or motivates them to make the very best possible progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Your focus on quickly improving safeguarding and child protection arrangements is effective to ensure that you minimise the risk of harm to any pupil. Your staff have a secure understanding of the need to protect pupils from all possible risks. Staff are supported well by safeguarding leaders and improved processes and procedures. There is evidence that staff understand more fully the systems for recording and referring concerns to keep pupils safe.

The interim safeguarding lead monitors staff concerns carefully and in accordance with current guidance and statutory requirements from the Secretary of State. Records are now more detailed and robust. However, you are fully aware that further work needs to be undertaken to improve site security. Risk assessments need to be more rigorous and checks made to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. You have detailed plans in place to improve site security and have already put in place increased security measures as an interim measure, but it is yet too early to evaluate their effectiveness.

Pupils' behaviour is improving. Leaders carefully record behaviour incidents and incidents of restraints in pupils' files. These are then analysed to spot patterns and possible triggers for challenging behaviour. Consequently, the frequency of incidents of challenging behaviour in the school is falling.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress that pupils make has risen. This improvement has been recognised by parents and carers who informed inspectors that, under your leadership, the quality of education and care provided by the school is quickly improving.

Teachers are now carefully tracking what pupils can and cannot do. Assessment in communication, language and mathematics is used effectively to identify pupils' next steps in their learning. You are clearly aware that assessment systems now in place need to be secured and consistently applied across all subjects to enable

leaders to monitor progress across the curriculum.

Pupils' individual needs are now being met much more effectively. Pupils' learning prepares them better to understand the world of work and has raised their aspirations. Pupils have been increasingly involved in challenging the hearing world to understand and respect equalities, in particular the rights of those who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, the work that teachers provide for pupils in school and for homework is too often not sufficiently challenging. The most able pupils are not provided with tasks which sufficiently deepen their knowledge and understanding. In addition, where activities that are not age appropriate are set for pupils, they become disengaged with their learning, and progress stalls. Consequently, the focus of leadership and management on the quality of teaching and learning remains a key priority to secure consistently stronger progress for pupils.

External support

You have brokered a range of support for the school from a variety of organisations. This has included effective support for your middle leaders, which is providing clarity about their roles and responsibilities. As a result, middle leaders have increased confidence in successfully tackling the areas identified in the last section 5 inspection.

You are ensuring that any external consultants that you secure for the school are carefully checked, to make sure that they provide you with the very best guidance and support.