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Mr Sean Woolley
The Hill Primary Academy
Tudor Street
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Dear Mr Woolley

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Hill Primary Academy

Following my visit with Christine Cook, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 December 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

I would strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the Astrea Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - timelines in action plans are met and improvements are then monitored rigorously to ensure they are effective
 - governors hold leaders to account for timelines and the effectiveness of improvements
 - middle leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator and early years leader, have the skills and knowledge so that they are more effective in carrying out their roles
 - accurate information is gathered on pupils' attainment so that it can be used to follow pupils' progress and inform teachers' planning
 - safeguarding is more effective, including improved monitoring and successful implementation of procedures
 - a new marking policy is implemented effectively so that teachers give pupils feedback that will help them improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievements by ensuring that teachers:
 - use accurate information on pupils' attainment to plan their lessons so that they can identify and meet pupils' different abilities and learning needs
 - deploy extra adults more effectively to promote pupils' learning.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - a greater proportion of pupils attend school more regularly
 - teachers and more pupils follow the guidance and procedures as noted in the behaviour policy.
- Improve outcomes and ensure the welfare of children in early years by ensuring that:
 - all welfare requirements are consistently met and any risks are quickly identified and addressed
 - leaders and managers in early years are effective in identifying and prioritising actions to improve provision
 - an accurate assessment system is fully and effectively implemented and it is used to inform teaching and promote improved outcomes.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the executive principal, principal and other leaders, including the leader for inclusion and safeguarding. Both inspectors visited lessons to observe teaching and learning, met with subject leaders and checked the progress made by pupils in their English and mathematics workbooks. Members of the team observed pupils' behaviour during breaktimes. Discussions were held with pupils, parents and teaching assistants. Inspectors met with the chief executive officer (CEO) and members of the transition monitoring board (TMB). In addition, the lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the vice-chair of the board of trustees from the Astrea Academy Trust.

Context

An executive principal took up post at the beginning of the autumn term 2017. She works in the school for two or three days each week. Her role has changed from supporting school improvement in the first half of the autumn term, to directing school improvement in the second half.

Governance has been strengthened. The executive principal, one of the trust's trustees and two of the trust's executive directors have been appointed to the TMB. In addition, the trust's CEO attends all meetings of the TMB.

The leadership team has been remodelled. There are now two full-time vice-principals. A new early years leader took up post at the beginning of the autumn term.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have refined their improvement plans. There is now clear separation between who will carry out improvement actions, who will check they have been carried out and who will evaluate their impact. In addition, the plans now contain specific numerical targets against which improvements can be measured. However, some of these targets, although aspirational, are unrealistic. For example, a target of 98% for attendance is aspirational but unrealistic because pupils' attendance is only 93.9% currently.

The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness outlines the impact of the improvements that have been made and the areas that require further development accurately. For example, 'the variances in teaching' across the school and 'inconsistent assessment' are identified as the root causes of pupils' poor outcomes.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving because of a focused

programme of support delivered by the vice-principals. However, it remains inconsistent across the school. The vice-principals took assertive action to establish timetables for each class halfway through the autumn term. This introduced stability and certainty. Leaders, teachers, pupils and parents now know which subjects are being taught and when. However, there is a disproportionate amount of time allocated to English. For example, upper key stage 2 teachers plan for 12 and a half hours of English every week and only six and a half hours of mathematics. This is especially concerning as pupils' progress in mathematics was in the bottom 10% of all schools nationally in 2017.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. They have implemented many new strategies and are beginning to check on their impact. During the inspection, these leaders identified that some pupils' assessment information in the school's data tracking system is inflated. This means that leaders at all levels do not have an accurate understanding of all pupils' current attainment and progress.

The principal checked on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in some classes in the first half of the autumn term. Although he does not have first-hand knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment through focused observations in all classes, he does know where teaching, learning and assessment are stronger/weaker through the work of the vice-principals. The vice-principals are coaching and mentoring their colleagues well.

The members of the TMB are asking much more challenging questions of the principal and the executive principal. However, they acknowledge that the pace of change has been too slow. Quite correctly, the CEO changed the focus of the executive headteacher's work from supporting school improvement to directing school improvement during the autumn term 2017.

Leaders have not ensured that pupils attend school often enough. In fact, the proportion of pupils who attend school every day is lower now than it was during the same period in the previous academic year. The school has asked Barnsley local authority to issue a number of fixed-penalty notices in relation to unauthorised term-time holidays.

Too many pupils are late for school. Attendance registers are not always completed correctly in respect of those pupils who arrive after registration has closed. Leaders were unaware of this issue until this inspection.

All pupils now access full-time educational provision. Effective action was taken to address the small number of pupils who had been subject to illegal exclusions at the time of the last monitoring inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inspectors saw examples of effective teaching in each key stage. These teachers used their prior knowledge of pupils' strengths and areas for development to plan interesting lessons that engaged and excited their pupils. They adapted their teaching in lessons to meet pupils' emerging needs. However, some pupils made poor progress in lessons because teachers did not enforce the school's behaviour norms. For example, in a key stage 1 mathematics lesson, the pupils carried on their own conversations rather than listening to the teacher's explanations and instructions. These pupils made very little progress.

Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils. For example, in Year 2, teachers do not insist that pupils write one digit in one square in mathematics. They have not explained the benefits of setting their work out correctly to their pupils. Similarly, in Year 6, despite daily handwriting lessons, some pupils are sizing upper and lower case letters incorrectly, while others are placing letters on, under or above the line incorrectly.

Teachers, as instructed by leaders, are using standardised tests at regular intervals to measure each individual pupil's attainment. The results generated by these tests are a little generous when compared with the work recorded by pupils in their exercise books.

Teaching assistants are deployed increasingly well. They appreciate the support, training and time given by leaders to improve their work. Teaching assistants' subject knowledge, especially in English and mathematics, is much improved.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils told the inspectors that behaviour is improving and that bullying incidents have decreased. Their view was confirmed by the school's behaviour monitoring information, which showed a sizeable increase in the number of pupils who follow the school's rules. However, one pupil said that name-calling, including homophobic name-calling, remains 'atrocious' in school.

Although name-calling information is stored in an online database, leaders do not analyse and report the numbers and types of incidents. Members of the TMB were unaware of the issues around name-calling prior to this inspection.

Leaders have consulted with pupils, parents and staff about the contents of the school's behaviour policy. A new policy has been agreed and is due to be launched at the beginning of the spring term.

Outcomes for pupils

The 2017 cohort of Year 6 pupils made below-average progress in reading and well below-average progress in writing and mathematics during their time in key stage 2. Only 39% achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined, compared with 61% nationally. At the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was also below that found nationally, while 73% of pupils achieved the standard in the Year 1 phonics check which, although improving, remains below the national average. Children in early years made good progress from their individual starting points, and 68% achieved a good level of development, compared with 71% nationally.

The school's assessment tracking information, together with the work in pupils' exercise books, indicate that pupils are making better progress now than they were over the same period last year. Progress in early years is particularly strong.

External support

The local authority supported the school well by moderating statutory assessments in early years, key stage 1 (including Year 1 phonics) and key stage 2. There has been no additional external verification of the school's effectiveness other than the activities undertaken by the trust.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders must monitor the numbers and types of behavioural incidents, including name-calling incidents, in school and report these figures to the TMB each half term.
- Leaders must ensure that all registers are completed in accordance with the Department for Education's school attendance guidance.
- Leaders must take action to increase the number of pupils who attend school punctually every day.