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Helen Pearson
Principal
Ryecroft Primary Academy
Kesteven Close
Holmewood
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD4 0LS

Dear Mrs Pearson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ryecroft Primary Academy

Following my visit with Judith Shaw, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 3–4 October 2018, 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy council and chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of Northern Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children’s services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective by:
 - implementing systems for checking the suitability of staff to work in the school in line with Department for Education (DfE) requirements
 - implementing a robust monitoring system to guarantee that all required checks on staff are in place and the school's record of checks is complete and up to date
 - making sure that the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and all staff are knowledgeable about how to promote pupils' safety and welfare.
- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the school's performance
 - improvement plans are sharply focused on the school's key weaknesses and are regularly and robustly reviewed and updated
 - performance management is used to drive improvement in teaching, accelerate pupils' progress, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and hold teachers and leaders more rigorously to account
 - additional funding, including the pupil premium, is used effectively and the impact of this funding on outcomes for pupils is closely monitored by senior leaders
 - pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced, especially their knowledge of the faiths and cultures of people living in modern Britain.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and increase the progress pupils make, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have the strong subject knowledge needed to teach pupils well and assess their progress accurately
 - assessment information is used effectively by teachers to plan learning activities which are closely matched to pupils' interests and levels of ability.

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 pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 3 October 2018 to 4 October 2018

Evidence

Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders throughout the inspection. Inspectors also met with several middle leaders and staff who are new to the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of the academy council and another governor. He also held discussions with the deputy chief executive officer (CEO) of Northern Education Trust (NET, otherwise referred to as the trust). Inspectors and senior leaders made brief visits together to each class, including the provision for two-year olds. Inspectors listened to what pupils had to say about their school and the lead inspector met with the school council. Four pupils read aloud to the lead inspector. Inspectors, with leaders, examined a sample of pupils' workbooks alongside assessment information. A range of documents was scrutinised, including the school improvement plan, minutes of academy council meetings, leaders' evaluation records, curriculum plans and safeguarding information.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, two teachers and a business manager have joined the school staff. Two teachers who were on long-term supply have left.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have increased the momentum that was building at the time of the last monitoring inspection. The lead inspector noted, at the previous inspection, that the seeds of improvement had taken root. Green shoots are now beginning to mature. This is evident, not least, in the further enhancing of the school's positive culture. There is no weakness that the inspector identified at the previous inspection that leaders have not pursued with vigour.

The senior leaders, some of whom were new at the time of the last inspection, have melded into a unified, energetic force. Each is clear about what the priorities are, what needs to be accomplished and how these will be measured. Leaders have identified priorities that further address the areas for improvement. Leaders' action planning is sharp.

Senior leaders are leading effectively the continuing improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. This effective leadership is manifest in the growing consistency in the quality of teaching. Leaders continue to check the quality of teaching often. They identify strengths and weaknesses and staff respond positively. Leaders are tactical in their direction of each key stage team. They are clear about the learning pupils have missed, what the pupils need to learn and what teachers need to do in order to bridge the gap. Leaders continue to check meticulously the progress of pupils. They are swift to act where pupils are not

progressing quickly enough.

Senior leaders have devolved leadership roles to other teachers, who now have responsibility for leading subjects across the curriculum. Most of these leaders are inexperienced. However, coaching from the principal and other senior leaders has helped them to make a positive start. Crucially, middle leaders understand that their most important responsibility is to ensure that pupils reach good standards in a wide range of subjects. They have clear plans for how they will support their colleagues and check pupils' learning. Although the development of middle leaders is a positive step in the right direction, it is a late development. This is because of the earlier instability in staffing, given the length of time the school has been in special measures. It is imperative these enthusiastic middle leaders bring about swift improvements in the teaching of a wide range of subjects, in addition to reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have further tightened the safer recruitment process. They have ensured that all the required checks on newly appointed staff have been made. The statutory record of these checks is complete and accurate. New staff are well trained. They understand and act on their safeguarding and child protection duties.

At the time of the inspection, the child protection policy on the school's website was out of date and did not meet statutory requirements. However, the new policy was awaiting ratification by the trust. Leaders have in place amendments that ensure that the policy is adapted to the specific risks associated with the local area. This oversight has not compromised the safety of pupils; nevertheless, the omission is inexcusable.

The two effective governors who form the academy council continue to have proper oversight of the school. They concentrate on the right priorities. They are knowledgeable because they seek the right sort of information. They visit the school often. They continue to be well organised and this helps them to fulfil the functions identified in the NET scheme of delegation. The academy council recently recruited another suitably qualified governor. Recruitment continues to be a challenge, however. Additional governors would further strengthen accountability at the local level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching continues to improve. As assessment becomes more effective under the close direction of senior leaders, teachers are becoming more consistently adept at pitching learning more precisely to the needs of pupils, especially in mathematics. Both teachers and teaching assistants help individual pupils, during lessons, to overcome challenges and to improve their work.

The positive relationships between adults and pupils are becoming even stronger. The quality of English and mathematics teaching, which inspectors observed, is engaging pupils well and increasing pupils' enjoyment of learning. Adults have less

need to manage pupils' behaviour because the pupils are so well occupied.

The effective mathematics strategy is being delivered consistently well in most classes. Teachers ensure routine opportunities for pupils to reason and solve challenging mathematical problems. Pupils are increasingly rising to this extra challenge. Teachers know where there are weaknesses in pupils' conceptual understanding. They are making increasingly effective use of practical apparatus and visual images to address this. Teachers are continuing to build pupils' fluency with numbers. As a result, the rate of progress that pupils make is accelerating.

Reading lessons in key stage 2 are developing pupils' appreciation for quality literature. Pupils concentrate and have plenty of opportunities to discuss their ideas in reading lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants are helping pupils to increase their vocabulary knowledge and getting them to think more deeply about what they are reading. Pupils are becoming better at reading between the lines. However, the reading strategy is not as well developed as the mathematics strategy. Most pupils have limited general background knowledge to help them understand what they are reading. This is the biggest barrier to pupils' progress in key stage 2. The leader of English has a well-considered plan to raise attainment in reading further.

The generally strong teaching of mathematics is not reflected in a wide range of subjects. The development of the wider curriculum is a high priority this year. Leaders have made an encouraging start to designing a curriculum that is relevant and appealing to pupils. However, work in a range of subjects sometimes does not engage pupils as well as work in reading, writing and mathematics. Furthermore, curriculum plans are not designed in a way that is likely to systematically build pupils' knowledge progressively in each subject over time.

The much improved early years provision noted at the last monitoring inspection has continued to develop. Provision in Nursery sustains children's concentration. They follow routines, are well settled and are quickly developing confidence and independence. The atmosphere in Reception is calm and purposeful. Provision for two-year-olds is effective. Throughout the early years, adults are quick to intervene where barriers to learning are identified. Given that many children enter the early years with very limited communication and language skills, adults have been well trained and are effective in helping pupils to begin to express themselves using full sentences.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour of pupils was not an area for improvement identified at the inspection in November 2016. However, the inspector identified this as an emerging issue at the first monitoring inspection that took place in July 2017. Inspectors considered the behaviour of pupils during this monitoring inspection.

The great improvement in behaviour observed at the last inspection has been

sustained. The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves well. Desired positive behaviours are becoming normalised for many pupils, who are now behaving well regardless of whether they will be rewarded. Pupils understand and value the system of rewards and sanctions. They say that teachers sort problems out quickly. Pupils are unanimous in saying behaviour is so much better than it was and that there are far fewer incidents of poor behaviour. Indeed, staff have recorded fewer incidents than over a similar period last year.

Leaders are designing school-based solutions to meet the needs of the most challenging pupils, as leaders have struggled to identify quality external support. For example, a time-limited nurture group is engaging several pupils in esteem-building activities, keeping them in school, when otherwise they may be at risk of exclusion. Exclusions are not excessive, given the very challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils. Rates of exclusion are, nevertheless, above average. Exclusions continue to be carried out legally. Teachers always provide work to be completed at home and a plan is always put in place to help pupils settle back into their class quickly. Parents are fully involved.

Leaders are beginning to better prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. The leader of religious education (RE) is beginning to improve RE teaching. A suitable curriculum plan is in place that teaches pupils about the major world faiths. The leader is ensuring that resources are available and is encouraging community links with faith groups. She has checked books to establish a baseline against which to measure improvement.

Though personal, social, health and citizenship education continues to be strong, the content that would best prepare pupils for life in Modern Britain remains a little patchy. Pupils inspectors spoke with still show limited knowledge about a range of cultures and faiths. Conversely, recent work as part of Black History Month has interested pupils. Most pupils the inspectors listened to could recall the story of Rosa Parks; a group of pupils were indignant about past injustices for black people in the southern states of the USA. However, none of the school council could recall learning about such important figures as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela or Malala Yousafzai.

The election of a new school council has helped the whole school to begin to learn about democracy. Many pupils value the opportunity they have to influence school decision-making.

Outcomes for pupils

The profile of more consistently effective teaching is improving the rates at which pupils make progress, including the disadvantaged. However, because of previous weaker teaching, earlier instability in staffing and the relatively late start in the improvement journey after the school was placed in special measures, attainment remains generally below average across the school.

At the end of Year 2, reading, writing and mathematics outcomes in 2018 were better than leaders originally forecast and were an improvement on 2017. The percentage of pupils achieving expected standards in mathematics was slightly above the 2017 national average.

Average progress across key stage 2 for the 2018 Year 6 cohort, despite some rapid progress during their last year in school, was insufficient to raise attainment and help some pupils to catch up from their previous, often low, starting points.

Limited English language development, over time, is a barrier for many pupils to their writing and reading development. Teachers are working hard to address this.

Very few pupils are demonstrating attainment above average. For example, only one Year 6 pupil is currently convincingly reading at greater depth.

External support

The recently appointed deputy CEO of NET is offering effective challenge and encouragement. She knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well, visits the school periodically and is otherwise regularly in touch to monitor progress.

Capacity for improvement is beginning to develop in the six West Yorkshire and Lancashire NET schools. The deputy CEO is facilitating better networking between the schools. The trust is identifying where the strengths are in each school and beginning to deploy these strengths for the benefit of others, including Ryecroft, which in turn has strengths to offer others.

The fact that most trust schools are a long distance away from West Yorkshire makes it difficult for the trust to deploy specialists. An exception to this is the very effective mathematics support the trust has provided. Other consultants, brokered directly by the school, have been helping leaders to develop reading and writing strategies. School leaders have made effective use of this advice and guidance. The school has recently joined the Bradford Primary Improvement Partnership (BPIP). This is opening up additional helpful networking opportunities.