

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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25 March 2019

Mrs Kay Willett  
Consultant Executive Headteacher  
Northfield School  
Knights Road  
Blackbird Leys  
Oxford  
Oxfordshire  
OX4 6DQ

Dear Mrs Willett

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Northfield School**

Following my visit to your school on 13 to 14 March 2019, 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 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2018.**

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
  - leaders and relevant staff fully understand safeguarding requirements and ensure that statutory processes are in place
  - systems and record-keeping, particularly those relating to child protection, are rigorous
  - safer recruitment processes are observed
  - all staff receive appropriate training and have oversight and understanding of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018'
  - the school's safeguarding policy meets requirements
  - leaders ensure that pupils who attend alternative providers are kept safe.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by making sure that:
  - a sustainable leadership and teaching structure is established
  - pupils receive their entitlement to a full-time education and attend regularly
  - the suitability and effectiveness of any alternative education arrangements are reviewed
  - the curriculum meets the needs of pupils, including the targets in their education, health and care (EHC) plans, more effectively
  - staff receive sufficient training to carry out their roles effectively, including those related to the behaviour management of pupils with the most complex needs
  - pupils' inclusion and equality of opportunity are promoted more strongly
  - staff performance management is regularly monitored and reviewed so that staff are held more firmly to account
  - the school's finances are kept under watchful review and evaluated for value for money
  - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress in all aspects of learning, by:
  - developing the skills and expertise of staff, so that pupils who exhibit the most challenging behaviour are catered for well
  - ensuring that pupils have access to and benefit from appropriate support that meets their needs

- ensuring that activities appeal to pupils and match their learning needs well.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils, by:
  - reducing the number of bullying incidents
  - analysing patterns of behaviour so that effective action can be taken to improve it.

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 13 to 14 March 2019**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the consultant executive headteacher, other consultant leaders, school leaders, staff, pupils, a representative of the local authority and the chair of the interim executive board (IEB). The inspector visited several lessons on three separate occasions with the consultant deputy headteacher.

### **Context**

In line with local authority's statement of action, work is under way to convert Northfield School to an academy. The authority has committed funds for a complete rebuild of the school premises on the current site. As the likely sponsor of the new academy, The Gallery Trust is engaged in planning with the relevant strategic partners. In the interim, the local authority is commissioning extensive support for the school from The Gallery Trust.

The chief executive officer of The Gallery Trust, who previously supported the school in her capacity as a national leader of education, is now the consultant executive headteacher. In January 2019, another senior leader from The Gallery Trust took on the role of consultant deputy headteacher. Two further Gallery Trust senior leaders are adding further strength to the senior leadership team. Their involvement was originally intended to be on a part-time basis but has currently increased to full time. The Gallery Trust is also supplying two business managers to provide additional support according to demand, and therapeutic and support workers. All this additional capacity is on a fixed-term basis, commissioned until the end of the current academic year.

The acting headteacher was signed off from work and was not present during this monitoring inspection. The substantive assistant headteacher has continued in the role of acting deputy headteacher. A remodelled IEB had its first meeting the week before this inspection.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

An effective start has been made in tackling the weaknesses previously identified. However, these positive steps are almost entirely reliant on the strong leadership provided by interim consultant leaders from The Gallery Trust, commissioned by the local authority. This support has substantially increased since the previous inspection. Interim leaders have taken determined action, suitably prioritising pupils' safety and well-being. However, the school's internal capacity to make and sustain the necessary pace and scale of improvement remains weak.

Working in partnership with the local authority, important steps have been taken to

strengthen safeguarding practice and culture. Training has been prioritised for staff, including about the matters contained in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018'. All deputy designated safeguarding leads have now received the relevant training. Important processes for sharing and acting on safeguarding concerns about pupils have been clarified. Staff are using these systems. Leaders are using a thorough, multi-layered strategy to establish, embed and monitor that the correct protocols are followed by all. These checks go beyond merely reviewing the process. Leaders scrutinise critical decision-making through reviewing how safeguarding concerns have been dealt with.

Interim leaders have made safeguarding processes more systematic. Helpful step-by-step flowcharts provide succinct and effective guidance about the correct procedures in different situations. Record-keeping of matters arising since the previous inspection is tighter. Leaders have introduced a new 'pupil concern form', which helpfully prompts the recording of the necessary details, resulting action and outcomes. Interim leaders have prioritised attendance at multi-agency meetings concerning individual pupils. They report that no meetings have been missed since the previous inspection. The single central record meets all requirements. There have been no new appointments since the previous inspection, but there is written evidence on file that consultants and leaders from The Gallery Trust have been subject to all relevant checks. Leaders have updated safeguarding-related policies to reflect statutory guidance and current improved practice.

To deal with historic safeguarding records for pupils still on roll, interim leaders have rationalised and centralised relevant information from previously separate systems. The thorough checking of these files to produce a complete chronological overview of the history for each pupil remains ongoing. Sensibly, files are being tackled in priority order, based on leaders' risk assessments. However, this vital work should be completed as a matter of urgency. Until it is finished, leaders cannot be certain that nothing significant has previously been missed. This work was progressed further during this inspection.

Interim leaders have acted swiftly in response to the worrying findings of the previous inspection that many pupils were not receiving the full-time education to which they are entitled. Leaders have systematically audited the educational offer for pupils who were signed up for alternative provision without a clear reason, only attending school part time, or not attending at all. The school subsequently held 19 emergency annual reviews aimed at determining more suitable provision to meet pupils' needs. While these first steps have been taken, there is much still to do to resolve the situation for many pupils who have previously been seriously let down. Although there are feasible plans in place for most, many of the plans are yet to be realised. Currently, more than a handful of pupils remain on the school's roll without accessing full-time or, occasionally, any education.

The school's quality assurance of alternative providers has improved. Since January, leaders and the local authority have visited the alternative provision still accessed by

pupils. Most importantly, they have undertaken checks of safeguarding arrangements. They have also started to evaluate the quality of the provision and the difference it is making to pupils' outcomes. Reports show a reasonable degree of thoroughness and take account of pupils' personal development, welfare and attendance at the setting. A new role of 'bespoke pathway key workers' has been created. Their role is exclusively dedicated to keeping a much closer oversight of the welfare of pupils accessing alternative provision and the quality of education they are receiving.

Interim leaders have provided staff with in-school training about positive responses to pupils' behaviour. Staff also benefit from ongoing training, for example about attachment theories and the principles of specific approaches to behaviour management. Staff view the new individual behaviour plans for pupils as a positive step. These plans prompt staff to anticipate individual pupils' potentially challenging behaviour, proactively plan to avoid it, and consider the best response should it occur. However, teachers do not consistently follow these plans and put the strategies in place. Support staff are not sufficiently familiar with the content of these plans.

Staff are positive about the difference that The Gallery Trust is making. They spoke of the 'professionalism' that the consultant leadership team has brought to the school. They particularly value the clearer sense of purpose and direction. They feel that the school is starting to move in the right direction. Teachers voluntarily accepted the invitation of interim leaders to change their appraisal targets mid-cycle, so that these became a helpful part of the overall raising achievement plan. Staff value the newly refreshed and refocused small-group supervision and the self-reflection prompted by the visiting facilitator.

At present, interim leaders have begun to set the direction and provide support and training. However, they have not yet held teachers to account for the successful delivery of these vital improvements. The first round of formal observation was due at the time of this monitoring inspection. Interim leaders recognise that balancing support and training with reasonable accountability now is crucial to securing the necessary pace and extent of improvement required in the best interests of pupils.

The local authority reports that the budget deficit has been stabilised for the current year. Interim leaders have put in place acceptable plans for the future spending of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. These plans are not yet published but have been included as part of the school's new website, which is due to go live imminently.

The school's 'raising achievement plan' shows ambition, aspiration and vision for what leaders hope to achieve. It suitably delegates leadership responsibility for particular aspects of the plan. However, it does not provide a sufficiently clear guide of what will improve, when, and by how much. This is because the dense detail included makes the plan hard to navigate. Despite considerable detail in some

respects, the plan lacks precision in others. For example, it does not specify the measures and milestones that would enable leaders to check easily and regularly that the school is on track. Too many of the timeframes in the plan are much too broad, with some spanning four terms.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Consultant leaders have begun efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Some of the most challenging pupil behaviour that previously disrupted teaching and learning because pupils' needs were not met has been dissipated by a change to pupil groupings and staff deployment. The engagement of pupils who have historically presented the biggest challenge has started to improve because provision is more tailored to their emotional and behavioural needs. Staff taking this group have made a positive start in developing relationships and establishing 'non-negotiables' with the aim of creating an effective climate for learning. Across the school, many pupils still routinely demonstrate disaffection and disengagement. This still goes unchallenged by some staff, who too readily accept, and so almost condone, pupils' choices to opt out. Pupils spend too long working in isolation or choosing not to take part in lessons and tasks.

Some strengths in teaching continue to exist. Interim leaders evaluate accurately both the strengths and weaknesses in practice. Some staff have responded well to changes in the planning and implementation of the curriculum, but this is not a consistent picture. Overall, teachers' aspirations and expectations remain too low. Some do not have sufficient subject knowledge to teach the curriculum well. There is still a long way to go before the quality of teaching matches pupils' learning needs adequately, including the requirements of their EHC plans. Equality of opportunity for pupils is still not assured.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

There are early, encouraging signs of improvements in some pupils' behaviour. Pupils, staff and leaders report that the school is calmer now. Fixed-term exclusions have fallen dramatically this term, with very few being issued. The group of pupils who met formally with the inspector were excellent representatives of the school and should feel proud. They conducted themselves extremely well and answered his questions sensibly and thoughtfully. The information and views that they shared were an incredibly helpful part of the inspection evidence. Pupils outlined lots of changes they have noticed. While they often find change unsettling and difficult to navigate, they were clear that, overall, these changes were for the better.

While this improving atmosphere is a positive and noteworthy start, too many pupils spend too little time learning in any meaningful way. Leaders' analysis of pupils' attendance shows that many pupils are starting to come to school more regularly. However, less than a quarter have good attendance habits, and overall figures remain woefully low.

Work is well under way to audit behaviour record-keeping systems, make sure that they are used more effectively, and analyse what they might reveal. However, leaders know that further work is needed to ensure that these are fit for purpose and yielding reliable and helpful information. Due to inconsistencies in recording and categorising bullying incidents, and the resulting difficulties in meaningfully analysing information that is recorded, it is not possible safely to determine a trend. However, pupils report that they have noticed far less bullying following the introduction of new class groups.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Too many pupils miss too much school. Pupils that do attend spend too little time in any meaningful learning activity. Until this changes, pupils' outcomes will not improve sufficiently. Early, encouraging signs in attitudes, attendance and behaviour, evident for some pupils, are likely to support better outcomes if sustained. However, even for these pupils, teaching and the curriculum do not take enough account of pupils' prior learning, or their special educational needs, to promote stronger progress.

Interim leaders have begun to work with staff to change the school's approach to the curriculum. The initial focus has been on making lessons more engaging, making links between learning in different subjects, and better meeting pupils' emotional and behavioural needs. However, this work is at a very early stage of implementation. Not enough planning has been invested in the overall intent and aims of the curriculum, or how the content would be most effectively sequenced to build pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time.

### **External support**

The most significant early successes are entirely dependent on the external support commissioned by the local authority. The authority also continues to provide ongoing challenge and support, checking that improvements are being made through regular visits and monitoring. However, this new board has only just been formed so is not yet able to demonstrate impact. The previous IEB played an important part in sharpening financial planning and stabilising the in-year budget. It was also helpful in securing the support of the trustees of The Gallery Trust for the trust's ongoing involvement and potential sponsorship. This original IEB was remodelled for valid reasons, including the connectivity of previous members with the proposed sponsoring trust. The experienced chair of the new IEB has rapidly and perceptively gained a realistic understanding of the task in hand. She is very clear about both what is required, and the strategic role the IEB should have in achieving this.