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Helen Bishton
Headteacher
Oakfield Short Stay School
Hospital Lane
Blaby
Leicester
LE8 4FE

Dear Mrs Bishton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oakfield Short Stay School

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 November 2012, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2012. 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 the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers should not be appointed.

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 Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2012

- Increase the rate of progress pupils make in improving their behaviour so that they learn effectively in all lessons and behave with respect and courtesy towards each other and adults by:
 - ensuring attendance to lessons dramatically improves by the end of the summer term 2012
 - ensuring all staff consistently follow school policies in managing behaviour
 - developing ways for pupils to reflect on their own behaviour and identify how they can improve it.

- Improve the quality of lessons so that all teaching is mostly good or better by:
 - focusing on what pupils should learn in lessons based on what they already know and their interests
 - ensuring teachers check pupils' progress throughout lessons and adapt their teaching if necessary
 - effectively tackling low literacy skills
 - ensuring managers take decisive action when teaching is inadequate
 - developing the role of the teaching assistants so that they support pupils' learning effectively.

- Ensure senior staff use achievement and behaviour data more effectively to direct the work for improvement by:
 - analysing data and using it to accurately inform evaluations
 - checking that achievement data is accurate
 - using the analysis of data to produce perceptive action plans that reflect realistic aspirational targets.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21–22 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, interim leader based at Oakfield Short Stay School, pupils, the Chair of the Management Committee and two representatives from the local authority. Most of the time was spent observing pupils in class and around the school to check the quality of teaching and learning and the pupils' behaviour and safety.

Context

Since May 2012, the deputy headteacher for secondary-aged pupils has taken up the post full time and the interim leader from the local authority has also been based at Oakfield Short Stay School. One teacher has left since the last inspection and two teachers have taken up post. Seven support staff have left, including a higher-level teaching assistant, and two support staff have been appointed. The number of pupils on roll has reduced from 50 at the time of the inspection in May to 36 currently. There were never more than 26 pupils on site during this monitoring inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Improvements in pupils' behaviour have helped more to attend lessons so they are beginning to make better progress but there is a considerable way to go before achievement is at acceptable levels. Pupils do not always make enough progress when they attend lessons because work is not planned to provide the right level of challenge. In too many lessons observed, the pupils were given the same work even though they had different levels of understanding and skills. The pupils were either expected to do more of the same if they had higher levels of understanding or were given more support from staff if they found the work more difficult. This did not help pupils learn some of the specific skills they need and therefore they did not make the necessary progress.

Staff are finding out more about what pupils do and do not understand but this information is still not used well enough to help plan or adapt lessons. Too often, pupils are overly reliant on staff support to complete their work and yet, for example, in a science lesson during the inspection, three were able to work successfully on their own during the practical investigation.

Staff are changing the way that reading and writing for younger pupils are taught and some of the pupils' work shows reasonable progress, but this is not so for enough pupils. Pupils in one class were keen to read during the inspection and a few had good strategies to help them read unfamiliar words. Extra support sessions out of the classroom have been established for some pupils with specific needs and are

helping to improve the progress they make but the work carried out in these sessions is not being used to inform how pupils are taught in class. Older pupils are not practising enough reading, writing or mathematical skills across other subjects.

The staff have been successful when supporting some pupils to work within a mainstream setting and, since the last inspection, 11 pupils have successfully returned to mainstream school full time.

The quality of teaching

In many lessons, better behaviour management has helped to improve the atmosphere in the classroom so that more teaching can take place. There is some good teaching but much of the teaching requires improvement, and there are still a few occasions when teaching is inadequate. In many lessons, not enough is expected of pupils and work is not planned carefully to meet pupils' different needs. Staff are cautious about adding challenge in case pupils' behaviour deteriorates. Too often, the work planned is not very interesting and explanations are not clear. There were some good examples of teaching, where staff found out about pupils' knowledge and skills and adapted activities as they moved through the lesson so that pupils could learn more. This does not happen frequently enough. In the stronger lessons, pupils are very clear about what they are learning because of the good, precise explanations given. Examples of writing and marking by staff sometimes contain spelling and grammatical mistakes and therefore are not providing good examples for pupils to follow.

The review of how reading and writing is taught has begun for the younger pupils and staff are working together to improve their teaching of these skills. This is not fully informing practice in Key Stage 3.

In the majority of lessons observed there were enough staff to provide one-to-one support for nearly all the pupils and no class had more than six pupils. Even with this level of staffing, pupils struggled to engage in some lessons, partly because the work was not well planned and there was too much focus on behaviour support rather than ensuring that learning took place. Not enough attention is given to help pupils re-engage in learning when they have been attending elsewhere or have been absent. This leads to pupils becoming unfocused and sometimes not willing to join the class.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour and safety of pupils have improved considerably since the last inspection. Pupils attend lessons more frequently and there are far fewer instances when staff need to intervene and physically restrain pupils. These improvements have come about partly because staff have a clearer understanding of what is expected and follow the policies more accurately.

There are some good strategies being used with the younger pupils to help them to understand expectations of their behaviour and pupils generally respond to these well. For those who need it, there are visual prompts to help them understand expectations and the routines of the day, and this helps to keep pupils calm and focused. Older pupils understand the reward scheme well and the grading of their behaviour is reliably noted at the end of lessons and break times. There is still a little confusion for a few pupils about how they can earn a better grading if they settle to their work once they have had difficulty at the start of a lesson. Staff rely on verbal explanations when working with older pupils and yet, for some, this is difficult and the language used is more complex than they can fully understand.

Pupils still struggle when unfamiliar adults teach different lessons and there is little preparation about this happening. The morning session and tutor times are not well used and are sometimes too long.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have successfully worked with staff to improve behaviour and attendance to lessons. This has helped establish a safer and calmer school. The senior team, supported by a full-time local authority interim leader, have prioritised most of the actions in line with the action plan. They have used the areas for improvement as a baseline and have effectively established a range of systems and more consistent approaches across the school with regard to behaviour and safety. There has been less focus on monitoring learning. Some day-to-day management decisions do not support pupils in the best way. This can mean that, due to staff absence, teachers unfamiliar to the pupils teach without having had any information about the pupils' different levels of understanding or of the work they have completed previously. Another example is the cancellation of important individual support due to staff absence; yet staff:pupil ratios are high and senior leaders do not have a regular teaching commitment.

The new tracking systems monitor the effectiveness of behaviour management on attendance and behaviour. It is only recently that there has been enough information available to evaluate what works and where further improvements are needed. Some of the adjustments required have been identified accurately but the current systems are not refined enough to look at progress in relation to how long pupils have been attending Oakfield Short Stay School. As such, the information is not always detailed enough to ensure full, robust evaluation.

There has been too little focus on monitoring learning and teaching. The headteacher has carried out some lesson observations but they are not frequent, are all of one style and have not included individual support sessions for pupils. The monitoring reports often focus more on the engagement and behaviour of pupils than on what they are learning. The support for the weakest teachers has helped

some of them to improve. Local authority advisers have also undertaken observations and found much teaching to require improvement. There were no reports available to the inspector from these and therefore no impact from feedback can be judged. Staff are not always consistent in their understanding of how much pupils already know. New systems have been set up so that staff can use information from the pupils' previous schools but also have their own information. This work is not fully understood by all staff and there are still discrepancies in the information. Other than the headteacher looking at workbooks during observations, there has been no scrutiny of pupils' work over time. In the absence of accurate achievement data, this is a serious omission in evaluating how well pupils are learning.

The management committee has been re-formed and has useful membership representative of local mainstream and special schools as well as a Chair experienced in helping schools to improve so that they are no longer in a category of concern. The committee is beginning to offer more robust challenge about the progress being made and, as more information becomes available, is able to identify where faster progress is required in order to meet the targets set out in the action plan. Its members have a good understanding of what needs to happen and are robust in requiring more when reports focus on what has been done rather than what difference it has made for the pupils.

External support

The local authority has provided high levels of support for the senior leadership at the school. The support put in place has helped to establish the systems necessary to gather information about how well pupils are doing. The local authority has taken swift and effective action to secure a management committee that has a clear view of the progress required as well as a strategic view of how to establish high-quality provision in the future, helping to establish more robust challenge and evaluation. Local authority representatives have a clear understanding of the progress being made by Oakfield Short Stay School as a whole and appreciate the improvements in behaviour. They are also acutely aware of where there has been less progress in helping to improve pupils' achievement.