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9 January 2015

Mr Roger Burman
Executive Headteacher
Abbey Special School
Little Common Lane
Kimberworth
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S61 2RA

Dear Mr Burman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbey Special School

Following my visit to your school on 8 January 2015, 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 September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, two members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority. The inspector was given a tour of the school while it was in session and reviewed some key school documents including the single central record. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the local authority has secured agreement from the Department for Education to consult on the closure of the school. The consultation process will finish on the 29 April 2015. In November 2014 the governing body was replaced by an IEB.

As a consequence of continued safeguarding concerns, the school is working with the local authority and in consultation with parents to transfer pupils to other appropriate settings. Of the 87 pupils who were on the school's roll in September 2014, 21 have already been transferred. There is a planned exit strategy for the remaining pupils over the next two terms. However, this is reliant on filling existing

places in other local specialist settings, use of out-of-area placements and a proposal to expand an existing specialist setting.

In the meantime, pupils are not being provided with full-time education.

The decline in the quality of the provision resulting in a proposal to close is subject to an independent review initiated by the newly appointed Director of Children's Services.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The leadership team and local authority understand why the school requires special measures and have taken action to strengthen the quality of leadership and management. Prior to the section 5 inspection, the local authority had brokered the support of a National Leader of Education from the local secondary school and good early progress was being made towards tackling the underperformance and complacency of teachers and support staff. Due to circumstances that could not be anticipated, the executive headteacher was unavailable for six months and the noteworthy progress being made was impeded.

The local authority has sensible plans to secure further additional support for the leadership which will increase the school's capacity to undertake routine managerial tasks. This has the potential to enable leaders to take a more urgently needed strategic role in raising standards of teaching and learning, including through modelling best practice. The local authority is also working with the IEB to ensure there is appropriate funding in place to secure the school's staffing.

It is apparent that the leadership team has a clear understanding of the school's issues and a commitment to bring about improvement quickly. However, this is being hampered by:

- constant changes in pupil numbers, requiring the school to review the composition of classes and distribution of staffing daily
- continued staff absence, leading to daily variations to staffing and resulting in a lack of consistency and continuity in both teaching and the implementation of strategies urgently needed to keep pupils safe
- continued low expectations of too many staff who, despite training and guidance, demonstrate complacency regarding the importance of complying with new strategies and procedures.

The school's improvement plan is a useful document which addresses the right areas and has recently been reviewed. However, the evaluations of progress are not precise enough about the impact of the actions taken. In order to fulfil the priorities clearly identified within the plan, the leadership team must develop an effective strategy which enables secure and rapid progress towards actual implementation. The school's self-evaluation is an honest reflection of its position. It clearly acknowledges that while there has been some improvement, there is insufficient

evidence to suggest that progress made on each area for improvement is anything other than inadequate.

Members of the IEB demonstrate commitment, useful experience and a real drive to ensure the best outcomes for the pupils. They have acted decisively to secure external expertise to support the school. They are also challenging the local authority about the pace at which alternative places are being found for pupils, as well as financial security to retain appropriate staffing levels. The IEB is clear about its remit and areas of responsibility have been delegated to each member so that the school is held to account more effectively. The IEB, executive headteacher and senior leaders' ardent resolve to ensure each pupil accesses a long-term appropriate placement is admirable. However, it must be balanced by the fact that pupils are still being denied their statutory entitlement to full-time learning because of the issues already mentioned. This must be resolved with some urgency.

The principal adviser began working for the local authority recently and has speedily brought herself up to date with the school's key issues, brokering additional support where appropriate. However, the local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose because it does not have sufficiently clear, detailed plans that identify how it is going to support the timely transition of the remaining pupils, the statutory consultations and probable school closure, while addressing the needs and expectations of parents and staff at all levels. The plan should be resubmitted by Friday 13 February 2015 and include detail of how the local authority will monitor and evaluate the school's progress.

Working in tandem with the local authority, the leaders of the school must with great urgency create a plan which secures full-time education for pupils where they are safe and have good learning opportunities for the duration of their placement at Abbey Special School.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

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 Secretary of State, the Chair of the IEB and the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diane Reynard
Associate Inspector

Appointed as an Associate Inspector under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule V2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006