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7 December 2015

Ms Luci Windle  
Acting Headteacher  
Abbey Special School  
Little Common Lane  
Kimberworth  
Rotherham  
South Yorkshire  
S61 2RA

Dear Ms Windle

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

Following my visit to your school on 26 November 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 taking effective actions towards the removal of special measures.**

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Rotherham.

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.

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014.**

- As a matter of urgency, improve the safeguarding of pupils and students, by:
  - urgently improve the security and safety of the school site as well as ensuring that statutory requirements are met regarding the safe recruitment of staff
  - making sure new systems to record attendance are used daily and accurately, so that all pupils and students can be accounted for and any absences quickly tackled
  - ensuring that staff always complete detailed records about all serious incidents, including where restraint is used.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that all pupils and students make good progress, and standards in reading, writing and mathematics rise by the end of Key Stages 2 and 4, so more students gain qualifications before they leave school, by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching
  - using accurate assessments of pupils' and students' achievement to plan work that better meets their needs and interests, especially for the most able
  - raising expectations of teachers and support staff as to what pupils and students are capable of achieving in lessons and over time, particularly in writing
  - improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics, so they can quickly identify what next steps in learning can be introduced
  - teachers making sure all pupils and students are involved in their learning throughout the whole of the lesson and not being allowed to give up partway
  - ensuring that teachers and support staff have, and implement, better strategies to manage pupils' and students' unacceptable behaviour effectively, in order to reduce the high use of the support rooms
  - improving the quality of marking and ongoing guidance throughout the lessons, so pupils and students know how to make their work better
  - ensuring that the gaps in what pupils and students, especially the disadvantaged, know and understand are quickly closed so that they achieve well.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels, including governance, by:
  - ensuring that the management of staff performance is rigorous and that targets set for teachers are specific and effective in accelerating progress during lessons
  - making sure information and data collected are robust and accurate, so leaders can evaluate the effectiveness of improvements being made
  - reducing significantly staff absence and making sure all staff who cover lessons for absent staff are well trained, prepared and understand what is required for each lesson
  - supporting and challenging staff to put into daily practice their training on proportionate and safe use of restraint
  - using the additional funds the school has to help the disadvantaged pupils and

- students catch up quickly with the standards which they are capable of attaining
  - using the primary sport funding to support effectively only the pupils it is intended for in Key Stage 2
  - developing the skills of middle leaders so they play an effective role in improving achievement in reading, writing and mathematics across the school
  - improving the effectiveness of governors so they are able to robustly hold leaders to account for the school's improvement.
- Improve pupils' and students' behaviour and reduce the high levels of exclusion from the school, by:
- providing all pupils and students with full-time lesson timetables
  - ensuring that staff can recognise what triggers individual pupils' and students' poor behaviour and so act quickly to de-escalate tension when it arises, in order that pupils' and students' behaviour does not end in crisis, and hence so reduce the need for frequent restraint to be used
  - ensuring that behaviour management strategies are consistently implemented by all staff, so that pupils and students do not feel the need to run away from school
  - providing activities which capture the attention and imagination of all pupils and students so they want to stay in lessons
  - ensuring that a consistent approach is taken to managing pupils' and students' behaviour so learning is not disturbed in lessons
  - providing pupils and students with a good understanding of positive relationships, sexual health and how to keep themselves safe from, for example, the risk of sexual exploitation.

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

## Report on the third monitoring inspection on 26 November 2015.

### Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the link national leader of education (NLE), both senior leaders of learning, staff, pupils and a group of parents, four members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority. A range of documentation was examined.

### Context

As an NLE, the headteacher from Winterhill School continues to support the school, but no longer in the capacity of executive headteacher. Staffing remains stable. Since the last monitoring inspection pupil numbers have reduced from 61 to 48. The school no longer uses Rotherham College as an alternative provider.

### Outcomes for pupils

There has been a fundamental shift in the senior leaders' ability to describe outcomes for their pupils. They have greater confidence, and the overall expectations of pupils' achievement are much higher. Seventy-five per cent of pupils are now on track to make the progress expected of them. All pupils are expected to make three 'steps' of progress over a year and the school's data 'flight paths' strongly suggests that pupils are largely on track. Given that in the recent past progress had been very poor, these gains might be expected.

Senior leaders analyse data to identify where there are significant differences in progress. This culminates in a report where strengths and areas are identified. For example, some assessment was slightly high in reading, and there was some over assessment in shape, space and measures. Further interrogation of data has resulted in teachers being helped to deliver more engaging mathematics lessons through an 'Active Maths' programme brokered by the local authority.

Underperformance is discussed and planned more frequently through the use of pupils' learning journals and at the half-termly progress meetings, which take place with the leader of learning for assessment. The introduction of cross-school moderation sessions are beginning to impact on the accuracy of assessments. These have been described by teachers as helping them to plan their lessons. Moderation portfolios are being produced and there is a sense of urgency to develop these further by ensuring they include moderated P level (**(P (performance) levels evaluate small increments of progress for children performing below the standard of National Curriculum tests)** evidence. While every child has a learning journal, senior leaders are aware that there are discrepancies in the frequency of use and effectiveness of comments.

The immersive curriculum, which is designed to engage pupils through props, displays, and resources, has been embraced across the school and has reignited pupils' enthusiasm and interest in learning, resulting in improved achievement in lessons. In a science lesson, for example, pupils used their knowledge to describe the chemical reaction using key words confidently and accurately. However, there are still some examples where learning activities are not always matched to pupils' levels of ability and, as a result, opportunities to extend pupils' learning and achievement are missed.

The introduction of sensory circuits for a small number of pupils has been significant in enabling them to access learning more readily. One pupil described how he felt 'more relaxed' and was able to concentrate more in class because 'it helps my anxiety and lets me concentrate more'.

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

Teaching is continuing to become a strength of the school. Since the last monitoring inspection, a review of teaching undertaken by senior leaders and the local authority found only one lesson requiring improvement. The inspection visit confirms their view that good and better teaching has increased significantly. There is now a clear understanding that learning needs to 'grab' pupils' interest, and lessons observed largely reflected teachers trying new strategies when delivering learning opportunities. In a science lesson, for example, as soon as pupils put on their white coats and goggles, they were excited at the prospect of experimenting. As one pupil said, 'I'm going to get messy'. One class had attended a junk yard music workshop and experienced using a range of household items to create music. This resulted in an extended writing lesson where pupils recalled the instruments used, their names, the sounds they made and the actions they used to create the sounds. One young man with more complex needs became very animated and tolerated the group activity well because the components of the lesson met his needs appropriately. Teachers are increasingly beginning to plan their lessons using assessment data, and, where this is evidenced well, pupils make better progress.

Learning support assistants know pupils well and are effective in helping them to behave well and complete tasks in lessons. Where teaching is planned effectively, it is difficult to distinguish between the teacher and the additional adults because they share the same high expectations of what each pupil can achieve and use their knowledge of the pupils to support their individual targets.

Professional development is responsive to the outcomes of the half-termly pupil progress meetings and learning walks. Staff openly describe the trust they have in the acting headteacher and leaders of learning, which has engendered a willingness to try new ideas, learn from each other and to hold each other to account. For example, 'Risky Fridays' encourage teachers to try something new and then feed

back to their colleagues during the following Wednesday morning staff briefing. This openness demonstrates the journey that the school has travelled in a relatively short space of time. However, sustained impact requires strategies to be well embedded and there is still too much evidence to suggest that not all staff are following these strategies through. An example of this is the schools' marking and feedback policy which, when used appropriately, enables pupils to reflect on their work in 'Reflection Fridays'. While there was evidence of marking in all classes, this was not consistent, demonstrating a lack of understanding rather than an unwillingness to engage in the process.

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

Pupils describe being happy in school because they feel better supported and listened to by staff. They describe the learning environment as 'colourful', stating that 'teachers plan fun lessons'. They like their new uniform and were able to describe how they chose the colour and designed the new emblem.

Staff training on managing pupil behaviour has continued to have a significant impact on behaviour for learning and there have been no exclusions this term. On entering lessons, classrooms varied from being calm to appropriately active and, on each occasion, pupils were engaged in learning. The behaviour of pupils was noteworthy throughout the day, and behaviour strategies are clearly being implemented consistently enabling pupils to access learning opportunities. A rewards and sanctions system has been introduced, which enables pupils to accumulate points for good behaviour and having a positive attitude to learning. Pupils talked highly of 'Maxine's mini-mart', where they can spend their points or save to purchase something bigger.

Displays around school are of excellent quality and relevant to current and recently past topics. They depict a range of cultures, including the travelling community, which has recently grown in school. One board celebrates British values, which are taught across school through assemblies and the curriculum.

Parents' confidence in the school continues to grow because they feel the school is increasingly able to meet the needs of their children well. One parent described how the school was helping their child understand their feelings by using a suitcase to 'pack away bad feelings'. Another parent explained how the school had made a significant difference to their family by arranging for their child to have regular blood tests taken in school rather than being doubly traumatised by having both the procedure and a separate visit to hospital.

## **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

The improvement to the learning environment is overwhelming and a credit to the whole school. The acting headteacher, supported by the NLE, IEB and senior leaders of learning, has continued to galvanise the support of staff, who enthuse about the changes she has brought about. Senior leaders clearly understand that their transformational journey of school improvement can only continue if all staff are engaged. They have introduced a range of strategies, which are already demonstrating impact. However, the school's self-evaluation acknowledges that there are still too many inconsistencies. The school's leaders recognise that these must be addressed before the next monitoring inspection.

The school's self-evaluation provides an honest reflection of where the school is and reflects the increasing ability of senior leaders to accurately self-assess their progress. Areas for improvement are appropriate, clearly identified and effectively planned for. Abbey is a school that knows itself well and, more importantly, what it has to do to become a great school. It continues to be responsive to the needs of its pupil population, as demonstrated by the introduction of a Roma parents' group. Staff talk proudly about their school and have risen to the challenge of shaping the school's ethos through engagement in 'Mandate' groups. An example of this is the introduction of a staff uniform bearing the newly designed logo of the school. As one member of staff said, 'We work as a team now'.

The IEB membership remains the same and continues to provide relentless challenge and support to the leadership team. The members are actively looking at the possibility of joining a multi-academy trust to secure a stable future for the school, while continuing to work closely with the local authority. They are clearly aware that the school is making good progress. However, they recognise that the budget will not sustain such small numbers. Discussions with the local authority are exploring the possibility of increasing pupil numbers and the viability of extending their roll to include post-16, in collaboration with other local specialist settings.

## **External support**

The actions taken by the local authority are continuing to support the school. However, this support is less universal, being targeted more to specific areas such as mathematics and science. The local authority's designated senior adviser continues to attend the fortnightly IEB meetings and describes the school's journey as 'incredible'.