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7 March 2016

Dr Tawanda Madhlangobe
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Madhlangobe

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Pinetree School

Following my visit to your school on 9–10 February 2016, 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 July 2015.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Chief Executive of the Engage Trust, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2015.

- Urgently improve the safeguarding of all pupils by ensuring that:
 - all the safer recruitment checks required by law are completed and recorded on the school's single central record
 - the school site is safe and that all health and safety requirements are met
 - the use of locked doors as a behaviour management tool is reviewed, and staff develop pupils' ability to manage their own behaviour around the school site
 - procedures to tackle persistent absence are used robustly so that attendance increases
 - risk assessment procedures relating to off-site trips and visits are in place.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors by ensuring that:
 - all aspects of the school's work are evaluated thoroughly, that detailed improvement plans are put in place, and that leaders and governors monitor their implementation thoroughly
 - all statutory policies and procedures are in place, up-to-date and reflected in day-to-day practice
 - pupils' emotional and health needs, together with the extent of their prior knowledge, understanding and skills, are assessed carefully when they join the school and that this information is used to plan their learning
 - systematic checks on the behaviour and progress of pupils undertaking off-site alternative provision take place
 - the quality of teaching, and the suitability and accuracy of assessment, are monitored carefully so that this information is used to assess the impact of teaching on pupils' progress
 - systems are put in place that manage the performance of staff, and ensure their appropriate professional development
 - all leaders have the knowledge and skills they need to drive improvement within their areas of responsibility, drawing further upon the resources of the trust in order to build leadership capacity.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that teachers in all subjects:
 - have high expectations of pupils' behavior and respond effectively to instances of disruption
 - encourage high expectations by putting in place aspirational targets for pupils that are appropriate to their starting points
 - establish the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding caused by previous weaknesses in teaching, and provide appropriate support in order to fill them

- use their understanding of what pupils know and can do to plan engaging activities that are suitably challenging, so that pupils can take the next steps in their learning
- provide regular and precise subject-specific feedback that makes clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work, and ensure that they make the necessary changes
- help those pupils with low levels of literacy so that they can read and write well
- observe the good practice that exists within the school, particularly in mathematics and in science, and benefit from high quality training.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9–10 February 2016

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and other senior leaders, the school council and four directors of the trust. I had telephone conversations with the local authority's head of inclusion and the head of its virtual school. Together with you, I observed pupils at work in five lessons and during a learning walk of the school.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have taken up your permanent post as headteacher. Three support assistants have joined the school. Currently 33 pupils attend on a full- or part-time basis. An interim executive board (IEB) continues to govern the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You have made a prompt start to leading improvements and tackling the issues raised in the last inspection. You are providing staff with clear leadership and have won the confidence of most of your pupils. They are respectful during your assemblies and respond positively to your instructions. They speak confidently about the changes you have introduced to improve provision and enable them to move safely around the building.

Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is largely accurate and is informing detailed plans for improvement. These plans and the actions stated in the trust's statement of action are steering improvement and providing the school with a clear strategic direction.

Arrangements to manage the performance of staff are firmly established. There is far greater accountability of you and your staff. Improvement plans are routinely monitored to measure the improvements being made. Other leaders are playing an enhanced role in reporting to the IEB about the improvements being made to pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement. Regular review meetings of the IEB are ensuring that you and your staff make the required improvements at a sufficient rate.

You have rightly prioritised improving safeguarding and ensuring that pupils are kept safe at all times. Policy and procedures have been strengthened. The single central record is fully maintained and thorough checks are made when recruiting new staff. All staff have attended safeguarding and 'Prevent' training. Risk assessments are in place for off-site educational visits. Your own records show that concerns raised about pupils' safety and well-being are followed up and that parents and carers and other agencies are fully involved and informed.

The school grounds are secure. Pupils have unrestricted movement from classrooms to the outside areas. Fire extinguishers have been replaced in classrooms and corridors. Procedures to evacuate the building in the event of fire have been tested recently.

You have made changes to the curriculum to broaden opportunities for pupils and enable those more suited to vocational learning to learn off-site and gain experience of the workplace. The school day ends at lunchtime on Tuesdays. This does not enable you to provide all pupils with 25 hours of tuition each week. The reasons for this early finish, and how this time is used, are unclear.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and learning are becoming more systematic and routine. A programme of lesson observations is underway, combined with regular scrutiny of pupils' work and reviews of assessment data. Your records show that staff are given feedback about the strengths and weaknesses seen in lessons, and the impact these have on pupils' learning and progress.

Observations carried out jointly with you confirmed that in several lessons teachers are well organised, show good subject knowledge and share good relations with pupils. They usually deal with challenging behaviour sensitively, calmly and with great tolerance. However, the impact of teaching is too often undermined by the very poor behaviour of some pupils in and outside classrooms that distracts others and restricts progress.

Pupils benefit greatly from one-to-one support in lessons, particularly when behaviour is managed effectively and support staff remain in classes to work alongside pupils. They help to explain tasks, boost pupils' confidence and encourage them to stick at it. Additional one-to-one support outside lessons is provided to fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding identified in their initial assessments. The impact of this support is not fully evaluated to show that it is leading to improvements in pupils' basic literacy.

Initial assessments of pupils on entry to the school provide a clearer overview of their prior learning, social and emotional needs, and interests. This information is beginning to be used by staff to plan learning that is matched to pupils' personal needs and abilities. Staff are also using this information to set pupils' targets, and to identify those in need of additional support to ensure that they achieve them. These procedures are new and are not yet firmly embedded.

Assessment procedures have been strengthened to check pupils' progress each half term, using standardised tests and past examination papers. This is beginning to provide a clearer overview of how those who attend regularly are progressing. Links with other schools in the trust are enabling staff to corroborate their assessments of

how well pupils are doing. Pupils' work is also being scrutinised by senior leaders to confirm whether they are making sufficient progress over time.

Marking of pupils' work is regular and frequent, but often it is far too generous. It often praises them for completing minimal amounts of work, some of which is untidy and incomplete. Pupils' books show that expectations of the quality and quantity of work produced vary widely; it is evident that teachers and support staff often work much harder than pupils do to maintain an acceptable standard of work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Staff are adept at welcoming new pupils, many of whom come with a history of challenging behaviour from their previous schools. They get to know each individual well and provide them with intensive care, guidance and support. This generally works, and most pupils respond well to it.

However, low attendance and poor behaviour remain significant barriers to pupils' learning. Too many pupils continue to be regularly absent from school and, at times, too many of them misbehave. This prevents them from benefiting from the improvements in provision you and your staff are working hard to secure.

The regular and persistent absence of a significant minority of pupils continues to present a risk to their overall safety and welfare. Monitoring of pupils' absence is rigorous and systematic, and improved communication with parents and carers are helping to tackle this issue, but so far this has not led to a significant improvement in attendance, which remains low.

Revised policy and procedures to manage behaviour are in place, based on a range of sanctions and rewards. These are not having enough of an impact on controlling serious, challenging behaviour. You and your staff, and the trust recognise that much more time is needed to embed these procedures, and to instil in pupils the need to manage their own behaviour much better than they currently do.

Outcomes for pupils

Last year, approximately half of all Year 11 pupils were entered for GCSE English, mathematics and science, and a few were entered for entry level awards in basic skills. Most of them attained an A* to G grade, or a pass. Monitoring of the destinations of pupils who left in 2015 shows that most of them went on to further training or employment.

This year, you have raised expectations by entering all Year 11 pupils in a range of examination subjects to ensure that they attain the basic qualifications needed for the next stage of their lives.

A small minority of pupils are taught off-site at a range of alternative providers. You are monitoring their attendance, behaviour and the progress they are making, to gauge what qualifications they are likely to achieve later this year.

Current progress remains too variable as it is often dependent on how well pupils behave and attend school. In lessons where behaviour is calm, pupils usually make sufficient progress. This is not the case when too many disengage from learning. When this occurs, very little learning takes place. Those who do not attend often enough do not make any progress as they are not in education.

A draft policy is in place to promote pupils' basic literacy but reading and, to a lesser extent, writing have a low priority. When asked, pupils say they rarely read anything. Books show that pupils are not regularly expected to write at length. Not all staff take opportunities to reinforce literacy by explaining technical language and showing pupils how to use and spell these words correctly.

External support

The trust commissioned the local authority to carry out a review of its safeguarding arrangements last term. The findings have informed an action plan to strengthen policy and procedures further. The school has continued to engage with advisers from the Department for Education to monitor the school's improvement.