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Mr S Cameron
Headteacher
Hallmoor School
Scholars Gate
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Dear Mr Cameron

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hallmoor School

Following my visit with Simon Mosley, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 March 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and manager are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Take urgent and effective action to:
 - complete the single central record
 - ensure that all necessary checks of all staff and relevant adults have been completed and recorded to the required standard
 - remedy the weaknesses in child protection procedures and ensure that actions taken are fully recorded
 - fully record all incidents of physical intervention and analyse these to see if there are any patterns and trends in order to take any necessary action
 - develop pupils' independence in moving around the school, ensuring that they are not moved by adults unless this is strictly necessary
 - reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent for reasons other than genuine medical conditions.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - improving leaders' and governors' knowledge and understanding of safeguarding requirements and good practice in keeping children safe
 - clarifying each leader's roles and responsibilities, and holding them to account for the impact of their work
 - ensuring that leaders gain an accurate understanding of all aspects of the school's work, and raising their expectations of themselves and others
 - developing a system to accurately assess pupils' progress in all key stages, particularly in Key Stages 4 and 5 and the complex needs classes
 - using this assessment information alongside pupils' work and direct observations of learning to evaluate the quality of teaching over time
 - urgently reviewing all aspects of provision and outcomes in the complex needs classes
- planning a coherent curriculum in all subjects, prioritising reading, writing and mathematics, for all key stages.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and thereby pupils' achievement, by:
 - ensuring that assessment in lessons and over time is accurate
 - using this assessment information to plan tasks in each lesson that are suitable for pupils' needs and build on their skills, knowledge and understanding
 - maximising the role of teaching assistants to promote pupils' independence and help them to make progress
 - ensuring that resources are suitable for pupils' ages and needs.

An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, representatives of the school council, the chair of the interim executive board and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors looked closely at the school's information about safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, teaching and learning. They spoke to pupils informally throughout the two days.

Context

A new deputy headteacher joined the school's leadership team in January. Since the previous inspection, two teachers and two members of support staff have left the school. A new teacher has joined.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leader and managers have responded swiftly to the findings of the previous monitoring inspection and have taken a series of well-focused actions to improve the school's work. Staff are working well as a team and there is a positive, forward-looking ethos in the school.

The process for assessing the progress that pupils are making is much improved. Leaders have thought carefully about how best to capture the small steps of progress that pupils are making in English and mathematics on a daily basis and to use this information to reach conclusions about their progress over time. The new system that leaders have developed draws well on the evidence from pupils' books and other work, together with professional dialogue with staff. Importantly, leaders of English and mathematics have worked with staff from other schools to moderate their judgements. They have also worked with Hallmoor staff to help them to be accurate when assessing pupils' learning.

Leaders have refined the way in which they monitor the quality of teaching. Lesson observations are carefully selected. Learning walks are well focused on particular aspects of the school's work, as are scrutinies of pupils' work. The conclusions that leaders draw from these activities contribute to the process of evaluating how well pupils are progressing.

As a result of the improved systems for assessment and for monitoring the quality of teaching, leaders' knowledge of the school has improved. They now know how well

pupils are doing in English and mathematics, which pupils need additional support in these subjects, and where to target training and support for staff. Leaders have rightly identified that the next steps are to decide how best to assess pupils' progress across the curriculum, and how to support temporary staff and higher level teaching assistants more effectively.

There has rightly been a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching in mathematics. The mathematics leader has swiftly taken a range of effective actions. A new calculation policy makes it very clear to staff how calculation should be taught and gives them a valuable resource to use. Training for staff, delivered to them in small groups, has improved their confidence and knowledge of aspects of mathematics teaching. Intervention classes for selected pupils have begun, including for the most able. The mathematics leader has carried out a series of lesson observations and, from this, has put together a carefully tailored programme of support for staff who need it. Staff are responding well. There are weekly drop-in sessions which allow staff to discuss their mathematics teaching with the subject leader. Although weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics remain, the good impact of all the positive support that the mathematics leader has provided is evident.

Leaders are thinking carefully about what the curriculum will look like for each key stage in September. In particular, they are aware that the current sixth form curriculum is not wholly suitable for the needs of the learners. Discussion is rightly taking place about the time given to each subject and, in particular, whether the good personal, social and health education, and sex and relationships education curriculum should be given more prominence.

Good attention continues to be paid to safeguarding. Leaders are constantly refining this crucial aspect of the school's work. Importantly, where safeguarding issues arise, such as recent ones related to 'sexting', the school both informs the relevant authorities and immediately adapts or enhances the curriculum as required. The school now has a good range of information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. Leaders are starting to analyse this information to find out more about any patterns across the school and for individuals. They have suitable plans to refine this analysis so it is sharper and more frequent.

Excellent work is taking place with parents and carers. The school has run a course to help parents and carers to be confident to talk to their children about sexual relationships. This course was very well received. Typical responses included 'there was so much to find out that I hadn't been told when I was young' and 'I now have the confidence to give my kids answers to questions.' The recent parents' day

involved parents and carers coming into school to talk about their children's progress and, at the same time, to speak to outside agencies about various issues. This day was well attended. The frequency with which the school contacts parents about their children's behaviour and well-being has increased enormously. The school is running a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) childcare course for 15 parents, in partnership conjunction with the local college. Parents thoroughly appreciate the level of support being provided.

The IEB is well led and effective. Members know the school well, and provide a good level of support and challenge. The chair of governors has a good oversight of the school's work, including important processes such as recruitment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improvements are evident in the quality of teaching in mathematics. All mathematics lessons observed during the inspection included the use of a range of appropriate equipment to support pupils' learning. Different activities, linked to the same topic, had been planned according to the abilities of the pupils. Where learning was most successful, the objectives for each group were precise and relevant, and the staff's enthusiasm for the subject was infectious. In one lesson, for example, pupils were learning about patterns through a range of engaging activities. They rushed to correct the teaching assistant's deliberate errors and answered the teacher's questions with great enthusiasm. At times, however, the objectives that teachers had set were muddled, which led to some confusion both from teaching assistants and pupils.

Strengths are emerging in teaching across the school and across the curriculum. An increasing proportion of teachers consistently plan well for the needs of the different groups of pupils in their classes. The contribution made by teaching assistants has once again improved. Many teaching assistants were observed asking good questions of pupils, which helped pupils to think and to develop their understanding. Pupils' communication skills are often developed well in lessons. The improvements in teaching overall are hampered by the continued gaps in staffing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour was good throughout the two days of the inspection. The school's own information indicates that this behaviour is typical.

Good improvements have been made to the start of the school day. Pupils now come into school very soon after they arrive, rather than sitting for lengthy periods in minibuses or taxis. This makes for a smoother, more positive start to the day and

pupils much prefer it. Lunchtimes are also greatly improved. The lunchtime staff are calm, positive and pleasant when they speak to pupils. Bright tablecloths, chosen by the pupils, look welcoming. A number of staff sit and eat with pupils, giving the lunchtime a more relaxed atmosphere. The playground now has a range of play equipment which pupils can choose to use with others or alone, including skipping ropes, swingball, a basketball hoop and a giant 'connect four' game. Younger pupils have bikes that they can ride. During the inspection, staff were playing games with pupils and encouraging them to use the equipment.

Lunchtime has also improved for the sixth form. Sixth formers have a smart new common room which contains computer games, table tennis, table football and a pool table. During the inspection, learners were thoroughly enjoying this new space, cooperating and socialising well together. Again, staff, particularly the head of sixth form, were encouraging and modelling positive social interaction well.

The school is working on developing pupils' independence in a number of ways. Travel training is helping some older pupils to learn to travel by themselves. Some lessons have a focus on independence. For example, in a technology lesson pupils were learning to weave. The emphasis was on them doing this without help, and showing resilience when it was difficult. Pupils responded well. Teaching assistants are increasingly stepping back from helping pupils too much. The level of assistance given is part of what is noted when pupils' work is marked. At times, the focus on independence and being an adult is undermined, for older pupils, because staff address them and praise them as if they were much younger.

Pupils respond well to the good quality sex and relationships education (SRE) that they receive. The school's analysis of behaviour recently showed that pupils were using homophobic language. A current focus in SRE lessons on different types of sexual relationships is now enhancing their knowledge and understanding.

Attendance is 92.4%, which is slightly higher than at the previous monitoring inspection. Over half the pupils attend for 95% of the time or more. The school continues to promote good attendance and to pursue non-attendance. No pupils have been excluded since the previous inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's moderated assessment information shows that the majority of pupils are now making at least expected progress in mathematics and English. A small proportion are making better than expected progress. The majority of pupils whose progress is not as good as it should be are in Year 7. These pupils have experienced

disruption to their learning when staff have been absent long term or have left. The school has just begun to run intervention sessions in English and mathematics to enable these pupils to catch up, where needed. A few pupils who are not making expected progress in other year groups are those whose attendance is too low or sporadic. The school does not yet have reliable information about pupils' progress in other areas of the curriculum.

External support

The support provided by a headteacher of local teaching school is providing useful advice where needed. A recent review by the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) on behalf of the local authority gave an accurate picture of improvements that the school had made.