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30 November 2016

Mr R Chapman
Principal
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Dear Mr Chapman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Calthorpe Teaching Academy

Following my visit with Rowena Green and Deborah Jenkins, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school 9-10 November 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 April 2016.

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 board of director's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) but it is strongly recommended that no NQTs are placed into the complex needs classes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of directors, 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

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2016.

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are effective by:
 - clarifying the extent to which staff appointments have followed safer recruitment procedures and taking swift action where any issues come to light
 - carrying out a full scrutiny of child protection case files to ensure that action has always been taken where necessary
 - fully embedding the new processes for recording and acting on child protection concerns
 - making sure that all staff have received the safeguarding training they need, that this is fully and accurately recorded and that staff consistently put this training into action.

- Improve behaviour and personal development, including at lunchtimes by:
 - establishing a clear and consistent approach to communication, including any use of signing, symbols, pictures and communication strategies using technology
 - ensuring that all staff, including lunchtime supervisors, only use any form of physical intervention with pupils where it is absolutely necessary
 - explaining to pupils, where physical prompts are needed, the reasons for this
 - allowing pupils to manage their own behaviour with as much independence as possible and teaching them strategies to do so when needed
 - linking records and analysis of different aspects of behaviour in order to establish causes of challenging behaviour and any patterns that exist
 - extending the opportunities that pupils with complex needs have to socialise with their peers of the same age.

- Improve the leadership of teaching and learning and thereby their quality by:
 - ensuring that, at all key stages and for all groups of pupils, the curriculum is relevant and suitable
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels lead by example by consistently teaching well and demonstrating and developing best practice for all groups of pupils
 - accurately identifying where weaknesses in teaching lie and ensuring that these are quickly eradicated
 - establishing where strengths lie in different aspects of teaching and ensuring that this good practice is spread
 - enabling staff, including subject leaders and heads of department, to see good and outstanding practice in other schools in order to consider how to improve practice at Calthorpe
 - improving the resources to support pupils' learning, particularly for those with

- the most complex needs and those with autistic spectrum disorder
 - ensuring that staffing in each class is allocated according to the needs of the pupils
 - developing a properly resourced outdoor learning area for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and ensuring that this is used well to promote pupils' progress.
- Ensure that leaders and managers, including governors, monitor and evaluate thoroughly all aspects of the school's work, in particular
- safeguarding
 - the appropriate use of resources including deployment of staff
 - the management of finances
 - value for money, including whether the way in which money is spent assists pupils with different needs to have equal opportunities to succeed.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9 November 2016 to 10 November 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, groups of staff, the chair of the board of directors and three members, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors talked to pupils informally throughout the two days of the inspection.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in April, 48 staff have left the school and 27 members of staff have joined. A new board of directors was formed in the summer term 2016 to replace the previous governing body. None of the former governors are part of the new board.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has focused strongly and with appropriate urgency on the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection. He is being very well supported by his senior leadership team. There is a positive atmosphere in the school and a determination among many staff to make sure that the school improves quickly to ensure better outcomes for pupils. Leaders understand that there is a great deal to do in order to make sure that all pupils achieve well. However, during the monitoring inspection, inspectors saw at least some impact of each of the changes that leaders have made. In some aspects, the impact of leaders' actions has been considerable.

The effectiveness of safeguarding has greatly improved. One of the vice-principals has taken over the leadership of safeguarding. He is systematically addressing the weaknesses in systems, training and recording. Procedures to recruit staff now meet requirements. Errors made in previous recruitment processes are being remedied. The local authority quickly gave good support to the school to review all child protection case files and to take action where needed, and continues to do so. A new system for recording concerns is being used efficiently and helps leaders to know when action has been taken and what further action is needed. Staff have received further training on various aspects of safeguarding. The vice-principal keeps a close watch on who has completed which training courses and makes sure that all staff receive the training that they need. He evaluates staff's learning very thoroughly and uses this information well to plan the next steps.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has also improved. Leaders have considered what constitutes good teaching for their pupils, and are evaluating different aspects of the lessons they visit against an agreed set of relevant criteria.

They are using the information they gather to plan the support that individual teachers need with different aspects of their work, as well as to evaluate the impact of that support. Leaders are also using their evaluations to identify where aspects of good practice lie. Teachers are receiving a range of useful support from lead practitioners and heads of department. Importantly, leaders are also visiting a range of other schools to look at different practice and consider the implications for Calthorpe.

Leaders have significantly altered the way in which classes are arranged. Primary pupils are now mainly class-based with their own teacher, giving the pupils greater continuity and stability. This is having a positive impact both on behaviour and on learning. The curriculum is undergoing major changes. Teaching is now based on the skills that pupils need to learn in different subjects and to support their personal development. Topics are broader and more relevant and staff have greater responsibility for, and choice in, what they teach. The staff who spoke to inspectors were motivated by these changes and felt that they were positive for the pupils. The school is reviewing the curriculum for the pupils with complex needs. Leaders acknowledge that, in this area, there is a great deal of work still to do in order to ensure that pupils receive a suitable and balanced curriculum that leads to positive outcomes. Some of the classes for these pupils are very large and the staffing is uneven.

As the principal has got to know the school better, he has learned more about the building's flaws, such as the lack of accessibility for pupils who use wheelchairs to specialist teaching spaces for music and drama. Much of the school is cramped, particularly in areas where pupils need specialist equipment. The principal has taken a range of actions to start to address the various building and resource-related issues. Three new classrooms have been created, two from part of the exercise suite and one from a little-used technology room. These provide valuable new teaching spaces. Major changes to improve the playground and the outdoor areas for the early years foundation stage pupils are also under way, and new technology has been purchased to support pupils with more complex needs. The principal and board of directors have begun processes to consider to what extent the building can be reconfigured.

The amount of therapy support within the school is minimal. The school employs its own speech and language therapist, whose work is greatly valued but who is stretched thinly, given the needs of the pupils. Occupational therapy and physiotherapy support is insufficient to meet the complex and diverse needs of the school population. This has an adverse impact on the extent to which the school can meet pupils' needs. The principal and board members are aware of these issues and putting them right is part of the school's strategic plan.

The new board of directors has established itself quickly. Already, members have a good knowledge of the school. Rightly, they have focused strongly on making sure that the school's safeguarding processes are fit for purpose. One member has taken

the lead on this aspect and visits the school on a regular basis to see how the work is progressing. Crucially, however, all members see safeguarding as their responsibility, so require regular progress updates from senior leaders in their governing body meetings. Suitable attention is being paid to evaluating how well leaders are improving the curriculum and teaching, and to managing the school's finances well. The board is small but new members have been actively sought and are poised to join once appropriate checks have been made. Members recognise that many aspects of the school building are not fit for purpose and are working with the principal to see what changes are possible within financial constraints.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders' monitoring information indicates that there is a variable quality of teaching across the school, and that there is often variability in the different aspects of an individual teacher's work. This accords with the picture that inspectors saw during the monitoring inspection. Clear inconsistency exists across the school, with some weaker and some stronger practice in each department. Nevertheless, some overall improvement to the quality of teaching and learning was evident.

Communication to support learning has improved. Signs around the school help pupils to know where different classes are situated, which in turn supports their independence. There is a greater and more appropriate use of symbols to help pupils to communicate. In some classes, communication strategies are strong – staff use straightforward, appropriate language, visual timetables help pupils who need it to know what is coming next and signing is used as appropriate. Reminders about expectations of behaviour are positive and clear. This strong communication environment is not yet consistent. The use of objects of reference to assist understanding is at an early stage of development.

When working with the pupils with complex needs, staff are not always clear what learning should result from the activities planned or from the resources being used. For example, a lack of clarity in different sessions led to errors such as switches being placed so that pupils could not reach them, pupils facing too many distractions to be able to concentrate, or topics being too abstract for pupils to be able to access them. In one session visited, however, each pupil was working with a staff member on a one-to-one basis, and each member of staff could explain what skill was being developed and how the activity related to the desired outcome. This variability in staff's understanding is also reflected in the planning for this group of pupils.

Teachers' planning for other classes is often very detailed but the activities planned do not always reflect the desired outcomes. This mismatch between the activities and what teachers wanted pupils to learn was also evident in some of the lessons visited. Conversely, in others the match was extremely clear, as was the progress being made by pupils as a result.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour and the management of behaviour have both improved. Staff have continued to implement the principal's drive for a thoughtful and responsive approach to the management of behaviour, alongside the minimal use of physical intervention. Records show that the use of physical intervention has decreased considerably over time and is now minimal.

During the inspection, the school was calm and there was a positive atmosphere in classes and corridors. Senior leaders model and encourage good management of behaviour, speaking warmly to pupils and reminding staff of strategies to use with individuals.

Changes to the way in which lunchtime is organised have had a very positive impact. The three dining rooms observed during this monitoring inspection were calm, pleasant and purposeful. Teachers now take part in lunchtime duties, and they are good role models for lunchtime supervisors. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and to be independent, for example putting their crockery in the correct, labelled box when they have finished eating. Each pupil has a place mat, which helpfully includes details of food choices and ways in which adults can support them to eat and to make choices. All of these strategies have had a positive impact on the atmosphere and on pupils' behaviour.

Major changes to the playground mean that all the pupils are temporarily together. There is a high level of supervision but staff are not easy to see among the older pupils. Leaders found an immediate solution to this issue and implemented it during the second day of the inspection.

Attendance is monitored well. There is greater challenge to the low attendance of some pupils with complex needs and appropriate involvement of external agencies where needed.

Pupils with complex needs are starting to have more opportunities to socialise with their peers.

Outcomes for pupils

Academic outcomes for pupils continue to be variable, in line with the variability in teaching, learning and the curriculum already reported on. The new strategies to manage behaviour are having a positive impact on the progress that many pupils are making with their independence and their ability to cope with different situations.

External support

The local authority provided swift and extensive support to help the school to resolve some of the issues around safeguarding, particularly those relating to child protection. The school has been proactive in seeking a range of support from other schools, consultants, academics and specialist trainers to help them to improve safeguarding, behaviour, teaching and the curriculum. These different aspects of support are well planned and are having a positive impact on the school's improvement.