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Mr R Chapman
Calthorpe Academy
Darwin Street
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Dear Mr Chapman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Calthorpe Academy

Following my visit with Deb Jenkins, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Robert Roalfe, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 27 to 28 June 2017, 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 section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second 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 school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs) but it is strongly recommended that NQTs are not placed into the classes for pupils who have complex needs.

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 who have 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 second monitoring inspection on 27 to 28 June 2017

Evidence

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

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, 40 staff have left the school and 21 staff have joined.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal, ably supported by senior leaders, has kept up a rapid pace of improvement since the previous monitoring inspection. Leaders have been thoughtful and analytical in every change they have made. They have drawn well on evidence about what works from other successful schools and from academic research.

Leaders have systematically tackled the long-standing weaknesses in safeguarding. All current actions taken that relate to safeguarding are robust and appropriate. Recruitment processes are strong. Training is relevant and clearly recorded. The vice-principal who is in charge of safeguarding has a very good overview of open child protection cases and a detailed knowledge of actions that have been, and need to be, taken. The team of designated safeguarding leads is well supported by senior leaders and in turn give good support to staff. The staff to whom inspectors spoke were unanimous in their view that they could take any concerns to leaders and that these concerns would be dealt with. Importantly, staff also said that they could challenge leaders if they felt that the right actions had not been taken.

Leaders have developed a comprehensive system to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and this has now been fully implemented. It celebrates elements of what the school calls 'magnificent' practice and identifies clearly what needs to improve. The staff spoken to felt that this system was developmental and supportive as well as being challenging. The vice-principal who leads on this aspect of the school's work has a good understanding of where there are strengths and where there are remaining weaknesses. Appropriate action is being taken to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have put a great deal of thought into designing a curriculum that meets the needs of Calthorpe's pupils. They have rightly prioritised the curriculum for those pupils who have the most complex needs, as the curriculum was previously not fit for purpose. The newly introduced curriculum, which is much more suitable for the

pupils' needs, is evolving well. Staff are becoming used to its new expectations and structure and are starting to understand the theories behind it.

New approaches to assessment are being implemented to evaluate what pupils are learning through the new curriculum. Staff are becoming more confident in capturing the small steps that pupils make, for example in their physical development or their communication skills. The assessment information is comprehensively tracked and analysed, and used to intervene quickly when pupils are not making the progress they might.

The new post-16 building has been opened, providing good-quality facilities that support an age-appropriate curriculum. Importantly, sixth-form age students with complex needs learn in the new building along with their peers, rather than being located separately.

Leaders have increased the number of therapists and other specialists working in the school. The increased amount of physiotherapy, in particular, is having a positive impact on the provision for pupils with complex needs. A behaviour analyst supports staff effectively with the youngest pupils, providing a range of training and development opportunities so that they can improve their skills in analysing pupils' behaviour and learning. Consequently, staff have a deeper understanding of pupils' behaviour and development, and use this to plan learning activities effectively. Specialist advice is being taken on how best to meet the needs of pupils with multi-sensory impairment.

Additional government funding – pupil premium, catch-up and sports premium – is being carefully allocated and the additional provision is having a positive impact on pupils' experiences and outcomes.

The board of directors is very well focused on supporting and challenging the school to improve. Meetings are well attended and the board members ask good, well-informed questions of leaders about different aspects of their work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching in the classes for pupils who have complex needs is steadily improving. The new curriculum is helping teachers to plan more appropriate and meaningful learning activities for these pupils. There is a greater focus on making sure that each individual's needs are met, while also making sure that pupils are having more chances to work together. In the best examples seen during the inspection, careful planning and observant, thoughtful and imaginative teaching ensured that pupils were engaged and interested and making progress. Physiotherapy programmes are beginning to be implemented by staff on a much more frequent basis. There were still examples of pupils not being able to reach equipment, activities not being properly thought through, or pupils' good responses not being maximised. Leaders and teachers know that there is still work to be done in ensuring that teaching for

these pupils is consistently effective.

The teaching of reading has improved throughout the school. Teachers are using a wider range of strategies, which are carefully selected to meet pupils' needs. This carefully tailored approach is proving effective in enabling pupils to make accelerated progress.

Teachers are not yet as skilled at teaching writing. Pupils who are learning to write tend to practise their skills in a structured way, for example by copying, but do not have enough opportunities to write freely. When they do have this chance, they rise to the challenge, as evidenced by some imaginative letters to Santa, stretching to over half a page. Leaders recognise that ensuring that teachers become expert in the teaching of writing, particularly in the secondary department, is a priority for development.

Leaders have radically changed the organisation of the youngest classes in the school. They have carefully evaluated the most up-to-date thinking on learning for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and their new approach is based on this research. Now, pupils from age three to seven with a range of needs have their lessons together. The classroom is a very positive environment that really promotes learning. There is a wide range of areas where pupils can explore, play, relax, write and take part in messy play. The free-flow outdoor area is large and bright, and has a variety of outdoor activities for pupils to enjoy. It is accessible for all pupils and enables those who use wheelchairs or walking frames and those who are able to move independently to play together.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour is managed increasingly skilfully and consistently. During the inspection, the school was calm and relaxed. There was also a great sense of enjoyment, both in classrooms and at informal times. The vast majority of staff have a good understanding of senior leaders' expectations about how behaviour should be managed. The school's records indicate that the use of physical intervention has decreased by 80% since this time last year. Instead of physically intervening, staff talk to pupils and give them time to respond. The improvements to communication throughout the school are really helping to improve pupils' behaviour. The greater use of symbols is enabling pupils to communicate their needs and wants, as well as helping staff to give pupils important cues about what is happening next. Excellent examples were seen on several occasions of teaching assistants using the new strategies extremely well to support pupils to stay calm and to be included in learning. Occasionally though, staff do not speak to pupils in the pleasant and calm way that leaders expect, and sometimes staff show a lack of patience.

Lunchtimes have once again improved. Pupils are now clearly used to the new routines that were seen during the previous monitoring inspection. There is a pleasant, sociable atmosphere in the dining room. A number of pupils with complex

needs now eat their food alongside their peers. Staff sit and chat with pupils, encouraging them to eat independently as far as possible. Other pupils with complex needs eat around tables together in classrooms. While this aspect is also much improved, weaknesses remain in the way in which some staff help pupils to eat.

Independence is promoted well with the youngest pupils, and is improving around the rest of the school. Sixth-form students do not always have the level of independence that they might, partly because of the current constraints of the new building.

The new playground for the younger pupils is a great success. It contains a wealth of specially designed equipment to enable pupils, including those who use wheelchairs, to play together. During the playtime seen as part of the inspection, staff stood back from pupils, enabling them to choose their own activities, which they did with great enjoyment. Pupils were supported minimally to enable them to do what they wanted to do, thereby developing their independence. Pupils who wanted a quieter environment could choose a quiet space in which to spend their breaktime. There were careful transitions between activities and between indoors and out.

The playground for the older pupils is now divided into 'zones'. Many play football, dance to loud music or play games such as skittles with staff and each other in the large playground. Others choose to spend time by themselves or do quieter activities such as playing with bubbles in another area. A new outdoor activity area where pupils build Lego models is very popular.

Pupils who have the most complex needs now have more opportunities to socialise with and learn alongside their peers. This was seen to good effect in one lesson, where pupils were showing each other different textured objects and asking each other about their thoughts and preferences. Around 20% of the pupils who have complex needs are now fully integrated into classes alongside others of the same age, and this is working well.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress being made by the youngest pupils is much stronger than it has been in the past. Pupils are now making much better progress in their learning, independence and communication skills. Importantly, pupils are more able to demonstrate these skills with different levels of support, different staff and in a variety of situations. Pupils increasingly make active choices between activities, are beginning to use the toilet more independently and are communicating their preferences with staff. School records show that parents are also noticing these positive changes at home.

In the primary and secondary parts of the school, pupils are making better progress in mathematics than they are in English. Nevertheless, many pupils' progress in reading is accelerating rapidly. This was evident in lessons and in pupils' books, and

was substantiated by the school's assessment information. Progress in writing, though better than it has been in the past, is not as strong as it is in reading.

Pupils in the classes for those who have complex needs are starting to make better progress than they have in the past, as a result of the improved curriculum and teaching.

Older students are developing their workplace skills effectively. For example, students who take part in the school's valeting business competently carry out audits of the cars' condition and spreadsheets to handle the money. Some pupils are aiming for level 1 qualifications and teachers' support for these students is appropriate. For example, inspectors observed pupils building spreadsheets of their eating over time and identifying percentage changes in healthy eating over time.

External support

The principal has systematically sought and secured a wide range of support for the school. Leaders at all levels and the board of directors have been to study practice in other special schools. A school improvement adviser visits regularly and provides strong challenge as well as support. Links with universities are helping the school to develop an analytical approach to all that they do.