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25 July 2017

Mrs Lesley Colthart  
Executive Principal  
Ryecroft Primary Academy  
Kesteven Close  
Holmewood  
Bradford  
West Yorkshire  
BD4 0LS

Dear Mrs Colthart

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Ryecroft Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 July 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 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 November 2016.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not 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 not 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 regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.**

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective by:
  - implementing systems for checking the suitability of staff to work in the school in line with Department for Education (DfE) requirements
  - implementing a robust monitoring system to guarantee that all required checks on staff are in place and the school's record of checks is complete and up to date
  - making sure that the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and all staff are knowledgeable about how to promote pupils' safety and welfare.
- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the school's performance
  - improvement plans are sharply focused on the school's key weaknesses and are regularly and robustly reviewed and updated
  - performance management is used to drive improvement in teaching, accelerate pupils' progress, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and hold teachers and leaders more rigorously to account
  - additional funding, including the pupil premium, is used effectively and the impact of this funding on outcomes for pupils is closely monitored by senior leaders
  - pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced, especially their knowledge of the faiths and cultures of people living in modern Britain.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and increase the progress pupils make, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able, by ensuring that:
  - all teachers have the strong subject knowledge needed to teach pupils well and assess their progress accurately
  - assessment information is used effectively by teachers to plan learning activities which are closely matched to pupils' interests and levels of ability.

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

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 July 2017 to 12 July 2017**

### **Evidence**

The inspector looked closely at those aspects of the school's work that were identified for improvement at the last inspection. Documents were scrutinised, and meetings were held with the executive principal and vice-principal over the two days. Meetings also took place with groups of pupils, parents and carers, two members of the interim executive board, including the chair, and representatives of the Northern Education Trust.

The inspector did not look at the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development during this inspection. This is an area of development that leaders have prioritised for the autumn term. The inspector will examine this aspect of the school's work at the next monitoring inspection.

### **Context**

The school has been through a period of considerable instability since the last inspection. The former principal, associate principal and vice-principal have left and the executive principal has taken over the day-to-day running of the school. A new vice-principal has been appointed. Four teachers and 14 other members of staff have left the school. Two new teachers and several members of support staff have joined. A number of members of staff are long-term supply appointments. The trust has appointed a new principal to lead the school when the executive principal leaves at the end of this term. The trust has also appointed an assistant principal and another leader who will have oversight of key stage 1 and the early years, both of whom will take up their positions in September. The trust has replaced the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB).

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Leaders and managers have not demonstrated sufficient capacity to sustain improvement since the school was placed in special measures. Leaders' energies have been absorbed in managing pupils' behaviour and in day-to-day teaching, severely limiting their ability to bring about improvements in teaching, learning and assessment across the school. At the current rate of progress, the school is not on track to be removed from special measures in the required timescale.

There are too few leaders to tackle the enormous task of shifting the stubborn weaknesses in this school. Apart from the executive headteacher, who has responsibility for two schools, both of which are in special measures, the vice-principal, who has spent most of the year teaching in Year 6, and the special educational needs coordinator, there are no other leaders.

Leaders and the trust have been unsuccessful in recruiting effective teachers.

Leaders have extended the contracts of supply teachers in the interest of securing stability in staffing. There remains an immense amount of work to be done with most teachers to secure the rapid progress required for all groups of pupils.

Leaders have taken appropriate action to strengthen assessment procedures in order to attempt to raise expectations and hold teachers better to account. However, this has had minimal impact on the quality of teaching, not least because of the high turnover of teachers.

The senior leaders have carried out checks on the quality of teaching in the limited time they have had. These checks focus sharply on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. Leaders identify clear next steps for teachers to improve their practice. The trust's achievement partner has also carried out checks. Leaders and the trust have provided a considerable amount of training for teachers. Leaders have reviewed with each teacher the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and assessment. However, these actions have resulted in minimal improvement because teachers are not able to, or choose not to, act consistently on the advice given.

The trust only recently commissioned an external review of the spending of the pupil premium. This review paints an overly positive picture of the school's planning and provision for disadvantaged pupils. Because the review did not identify appropriate actions, leaders have not yet revised the pupil premium strategy, so provision for disadvantaged pupils is not demonstrably better than it was. Members of the IEB and the trust recognise the inaccuracy of the review and plan to commission a more robust audit in the autumn term.

Leaders' actions to improve safeguarding systems have been successful. Leaders now ensure that systematic and thorough checks are made on adults, when they are appointed, to make sure that they can be considered safe to work with children. Substantial staff training in all aspects of keeping children safe means that adults understand their responsibilities. They report concerns large and small to the correct leaders. The designated leaders keep a close eye on patterns and trends in the circumstances of individual pupils and continue to make sure that the most vulnerable pupils are protected. Safeguarding policy documentation has been reviewed and supplemented where needed.

All staff have been trained recently in the positive handling of pupils where behaviour requires it. Leaders are more carefully recording the details of incidents. However, in the event of the restraint of a pupil, there is nowhere on the positive handling logs to record specifically which handling technique is used, nor is there a place to record the pupils' views of how incidents are handled. Leaders are more carefully recording bullying incidents but need to find a way of more systematically monitoring and analysing patterns and trends in bullying and to keep a closer eye on the victims of bullying.

The executive principal has taken robust action to eliminate the very weakest teaching and has managed to secure greater stability in staffing. Leaders have also taken action to strengthen procedures for managing behaviour, resulting in an improvement in the conduct of pupils generally. Pupils and parents value these changes.

The trust made a quick decision, following the inspection, to replace the governing board with an IEB, the members of which are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out their role. Members of the board rigorously challenge leaders. They make no excuses for the lack of progress and demand better of the trust and of school leaders. The chair of the board, in particular, is exceptionally thorough in checking progress and so has a very accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and pupils' achievement. However, the limited leadership capacity means that this challenge has not had the desired effect.

Governors recognise the weaknesses in school improvement plans that are more of a hindrance than a help to governors' checking on the progress being made against the areas for improvement. Improvement plans identify appropriate actions but do not identify sharply enough the difference that actions should make to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

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

The high turnover of teachers and teaching assistants, and the challenges of recruitment, have severely hampered leaders' attempts to improve the quality of teaching.

There is little discernible improvement in the overall quality of teaching. Teachers are still not making use of information about what pupils already know, understand and can do to plan work that matches pupils' needs. Consequently, teachers generally do not give the most able pupils work that is challenging enough or the least able pupils work that helps them to improve quickly enough. Too often, all pupils do the same work at the same slow pace. Furthermore, teachers do not give pupils enough specific guidance on how they can improve their work.

Too many teachers are not abiding by the school's agreed teaching policies and strategies. Teachers do not consistently follow the advice that leaders and other professionals give them; they are not making effective use of the training they have received to improve their subject knowledge. Teachers tend to cling to methods more suited to the national curriculum that was replaced in 2014. As a result, pupils are not making the progress needed to catch up in mathematics and writing in particular.

The school's assessment system is beginning to help teachers more competently assess pupils' learning, but there remains some inconsistency in the accuracy of assessments.

The effective teaching of the vice-principal has helped pupils in Year 6 this year to make rapid progress. In addition, there is some evidence of improvements in pupils' ability to read more fluently across the school because of a more systematic approach to teaching reading, though comprehension skills are still generally very poor.

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

Leaders, in partnership with the local authority, have put a lot of effort into improving the behaviour of the small minority of pupils who have made life difficult for the large majority. A number of pupils have been placed in other suitable settings where they can make a fresh start and this has had a calming effect on the rest of the school. Teachers' more consistent application of agreed procedures means that the conduct of pupils overall is improving. However, weak, unchallenging and often uninspiring teaching is not helping pupils to develop the positive attitudes and characteristics of effective learning that will help them to make the rapid progress needed.

A number of pupils expressed dissatisfaction with behaviour in lessons during the inspection, saying that learning is regularly interrupted. Inspectors will keep a close eye on this at future monitoring inspections.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Provisional results for 2017 show an improvement in the attainment of the current Year 6 pupils compared with that made in 2016, because of effective teaching in Year 6 this year and therefore stronger pupils' progress. However, so many pupils were so far behind in their learning at the beginning of the year that they still did not catch up to where they needed to be. The current Year 5 pupils, who have had 11 different teachers this year, are also starting Year 6 way behind in their learning.

Provisional results in Year 2 show weaker attainment than in 2016, when a higher than average proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

In both Year 2 and Year 6, and across the school, hardly any of the most able pupils are demonstrating learning at greater depth or the high standard of which they should be capable. This is because teachers do not recognise the capabilities of the most able children and do not give them work that is challenging enough.

The school's own assessment information suggests modest improvements in pupils' outcomes across the school, but work in pupils' workbooks shows some assessments to be inaccurate, casting doubt on the validity of this information.

Large differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others

remain. Most pupils in most classes fall within the disadvantaged category. Disadvantaged pupils, whether they have low, middle or higher prior attainment overall, do not make the progress they should because of the weak teaching.

### **External support**

The trust's actions have not been sufficiently robust or comprehensive to address the needs of this struggling school. Representatives of the trust recognise the slow progress made. The trust does have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school.

The school is geographically isolated from the trust centre and from other more effective schools in the trust. This is a substantial barrier to improvement. The trust has been unsuccessful in finding sufficient expertise in the locality or identifying partner schools and individuals that could help the school to move forward.

The trust has failed to ensure that there has been enough leadership capacity to sustain improvement. The executive headteacher has been left to manage two of the trust schools, both of which are in special measures, with limited suitable support. It is only recently that the trust has successfully appointed enough leaders to lead the school. A larger team, under the leadership of a new principal, who has a record of accomplishment in leading troubled schools, is in place for September 2017.

The IEB has been frustrated with a lack of clarity from the trust about its specific remit and powers and the lack of progress so far. No shadow governors have been appointed, as had been intended by now, so the trust are nowhere near establishing more permanent governance arrangements.

The trust has rightly prioritised pupils' safety, providing a considerable amount of support to improve safeguarding. An external consultant has trained, audited and reported on safeguarding procedures. Leaders have acted on advice so that safeguarding is now effective.

Leaders value the human resource services provided by the trust during a period of instability in staffing.

Leaders should further strengthen approaches to managing pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning so that pupils consistently work hard and are able to make good progress.