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Caroline Green
Principal
Beaumont Hill Academy
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Dear Mrs Green

Special measures monitoring inspection of Beaumont Hill Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 18–19 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 academy'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 January 2017.

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 proprietor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Darlington. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017

- As a matter of urgency, improve the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements by making sure that:
 - all checks on the suitability of staff are in place and the school's central record of checks is complete and meets Department for Education requirements
 - pupils' behaviour, including the use of physical restraint, is managed safely and effectively.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and governance by making sure that:
 - leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the school's work, especially the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the management of pupils' behaviour
 - leaders and governors closely monitor the impact of additional funding on the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils and use this information to secure and sustain improvement in the outcomes they achieve.
- Improve the quality of teaching and accelerate the progress pupils make, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with social, emotional and mental health needs, by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information to plan learning activities which are closely matched to pupils' interests and levels of ability
 - teachers check whether pupils are working productively on tasks which secure, develop and deepen their knowledge and skills and, if not, provide additional help or more challenging work
 - teaching assistants provide the consistent high-quality help and support pupils need to make fast progress in their learning.

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 18 July 2017 to 19 July 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, deputy headteacher, directors, teachers and four representatives of the local governing body. She talked to pupils informally in lessons and at breaktime. The inspector also spoke formally to a group of pupils and a group of parents on day 2 of the inspection. A discussion was held with an education development adviser from Durham County Council who has been commissioned to work with the school following the inspection in January 2017.

Context

There have been a number of changes to the school since the previous inspection. The leader of the Stephenson Centre stepped down in February 2017 and a new leader has been appointed for September 2017. In the meantime, an interim leader with experience in working with pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties has been secured. One teacher has left the school and three others will do so in July 2017. A new teacher has been appointed for the post-16 provision and an additional teacher has been appointed to work with pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Following the inspection, the trust stood down the education standards committee and established an academy monitoring group, the equivalent of a local governing body. This group oversees the action plan priorities to address the main weaknesses identified in the school inspection report. In the spring term, three governors resigned and new governors were appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following their disappointment in the outcome of the inspection, leaders, directors, governors and staff reflected on its findings and were galvanised into action. They quickly developed and then implemented suitable plans to address the weaknesses identified and to move the school back to good as soon as possible. Significant and urgent action was taken to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record that records the suitability of staff to work with children has been overhauled. It is now comprehensive, contains all of the information that it should, and therefore meets fully the requirements of the Department for Education. External auditors have worked with leaders to ensure that recruitment procedures are robust. An external human resources team 'spot-checks' recruitment files regularly to ensure that they meet the required standards. One specialist consultant for safeguarding evaluated the school's procedures and left oral feedback. Another reviewed the school's approach to the physical restraint of pupils.

Procedures for dealing with pupils whose behaviour is challenging and who may require any kind of physical restraint have also been completely revised. This has

included further training for staff on the techniques to de-escalate potential trigger points that could result in extremes of behaviour in class. Improvements in the curriculum are ongoing, not only to ensure that it meets fully pupils' individual needs and specific interests but also, importantly, to entice more pupils into learning. There has been a resolute and successful focus on developing a calm and respectful atmosphere across school. This has been a particular focus in the Stephenson Centre for pupils who require support for their social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Pupils in the centre report how much calmer the centre is and how this is helping them to improve their learning.

In recent months, there has been a step-change in the governance arrangements for safeguarding pupils. Governors have raised their game. They expect to be given detailed information about this aspect of the school's work and they understand the need to scrutinise, and not just endorse, the information that they receive. Leaders and governors have worked closely with the local authority's safeguarding leader for education. The local authority officer has supported school leaders in carrying out a full Local Safeguarding Children Board safeguarding audit. An action plan has been devised and implemented appropriately to ensure that procedures are the best they can be. A new safeguarding governor, who has local authority expertise in safeguarding children, has also been appointed. He is working closely with the principal and the school's designated safeguarding leader to ensure robustness in the school's work to keep pupils safe. Governors have demanded weekly reports on the use of physical restraints. Outcomes of their reviews are robust and challenging to leaders, including identifying if anything is not recorded as it should be.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the improvement plan includes the actions that need to be taken to address all of the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. It also includes actions that leaders themselves have identified that require further work to ensure that the school is good by the next section 5 inspection. Timescales are clear and actions identified are monitored meticulously and regularly by leaders and governors. Checks currently report too much on whether actions have been carried out, rather than the difference the actions have made. As yet, there are few measurable targets against which success can be measured. This is in part due to leaders not using the improved range of data available to identify the difference the school is making. Leaders are aware of this and are currently revising the plan to ensure that it has clear and measurable targets and that the evaluation process is robust.

A review of governance was carried out shortly after the inspection. It resulted in the resignation of some governors. New governors have been recruited with specific skills to enhance the effectiveness of the governing body. The previous education standards committee and the scheme of delegation have been stepped down in the interim and a new academy monitoring group was set up. Governors visit the school regularly and now have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They receive a significantly wider range of data and information against which they can challenge leaders' work to improve school outcomes.

Minutes of meetings identify the increasing challenge brought to bear and the direct and analytical questioning that requires honest and robust responses from leaders.

The rapid external review of the use of the pupil premium funding has resulted in a comprehensive strategy, action plan and the evaluation of disadvantaged pupils' progress over time. Improvements in the information governors receive at their monthly meetings means that they now keep a close eye on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

Communication with parents has been a priority for leaders. A parent focus group was quickly set up to understand parents' concerns following the inspection and to improve communication with them. Every parent that had a concern was invited to a meeting. This approach allayed parents' fears about the safety of their children.

The parent focus group met with the inspector. Parents were very positive about the changes and improvements in the education provided, leadership and in the open and regular communications that now take place between home and school. They spoke highly of the timely way that leaders informed them of the outcomes of the inspection. They appreciate the regular information they now receive about what the school has done to improve weaknesses and what is left to do. Parents are very impressed with the mobile telephone 'communication app' that leaders have developed. This enables them to see their child's learning and achievements 'live' and confidentially. Parents would welcome more regular formal reports about their child's learning and progress. Plans are already afoot to address this and from autumn term 2017, parents will receive termly reports.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Actions taken by leaders, including specific training and development activities for all staff and teaching assistants, are contributing to the improvement in the quality of teaching across the school. Specific short-term support plans have been created for individual staff members whose teaching skills require further improvement. Although its quality still remains variable, more teaching is successfully engaging pupils in their learning and ensuring that they make good progress from their starting points. Higher teachers' expectations and improvements in planning and use of assessment information are also contributing to the improvements seen in teaching and learning.

The teaching of communication skills is integral to the school's work. Signs, symbols or written words are used at the right level for each pupil to ensure that they can understand the routines of the day, communicate their ideas and feelings, and access activities. High-quality relationships between staff and pupils are the norm in classes in all years and in the social times and breaktimes that occur.

The majority of teachers now use the regular assessment information they have about pupils' knowledge and skills to plan learning activities that are matched

closely to pupils' interests and capabilities. This is especially the case where learning is brisk and where academic progress targets are clear and prominent. However, some teachers do not use assessment information to inform their planning for different pupils or to provide work that is sufficiently challenging. Consequently, there are still occasions where the work is not demanding enough and pupils complete their work very quickly. Sometimes, there is too much focus on pupils' social, emotional and communication development and not on the steps staff have identified pupils need to take to achieve their challenging academic targets. While pupils who are able to write are given many opportunities to do so, teachers do not routinely check whether presentation is as good as it should be.

The headteacher and other leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching because they monitor it regularly, both formally and informally. They also evaluate pupils' work and check whether teachers' assessments of their work are accurate. Areas that need improvement are identified and staff are required to address them before the next review of learning. While reviews and scrutinies are comprehensive, they currently focus too much on what is happening in the class and not enough on the difference teaching is making to pupils' learning and progress. The systems to monitor pupils' learning and progress have been reviewed and tighter systems will be in place in the autumn term.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour in lessons is well managed and pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils suitably apply themselves to their learning and are well supported by staff in times of need. Pupils report that the school has improved since inspectors were last in school. This is particularly the case in the Stephenson Centre where pupils report that the use of physical restraints has reduced significantly and the place is much calmer. They say this helps them learn more successfully.

The school no longer uses the most complex physical restraints and staff use only the lower-level support mechanisms. Much more rigorous recording of any restraint incident takes place, involving staff, pupils and witnesses. 'Repair and recover' discussions take place and support is provided following any serious behaviour incident and all actions, including follow-up actions, are recorded in a bound book and in the school's new electronic system. This enables governors to have regular oversight of physical restraint incidents and they track their reduction over time. Governors check weekly the content of the bound book that records incidents of physical restraint and the records in the electronic system.

Improvements to the way the school responds to pupils' complex behavioural needs have resulted in a significant fall in the number of pupils who need to be physically restrained for their own safety and that of others. In the summer term, there had only been two instances of physical restraint being used. Challenging behaviour is managed more effectively. Incidents of poor behaviour have reduced significantly over time because of improvements in de-escalation techniques, the changing

atmosphere in school and the higher expectations teachers have of their pupils' behaviour. This work is resulting in a calmer and more purposeful learning atmosphere in class. The use of temporary exclusion to address poor behaviour has fallen significantly since the last inspection, by over half, and the proportion is currently low.

Staff know their pupils well and are adept at anticipating any changes in mood, so they can quickly and quietly defuse a potential outburst and enable pupils to settle back into their learning quickly. Pupils' 'all about me' plans and their individual behaviour support plans have been amalgamated. This has been to harmonise the approach in identifying, and then meeting, pupils' individual communication, behavioural, social and emotional needs more consistently.

The use of pupil premium funding is thoroughly reviewed by governors to check its impact on disadvantaged pupils' learning, progress and attendance. Governors and leaders know that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still too low and actions continue to be taken to bring about the necessary improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Improved assessment systems are helping leaders to monitor more closely the progress of pupils, from their starting points, across the curriculum more effectively. They are aware that while pupils are making progress towards their targets and learning objectives, more pupils need to make good progress from their different starting points. Observations of learning and pupils' work show that pupils usually make at least steady progress towards their learning goals. Leaders know that achievement across the curriculum is not consistently strong yet, particularly at key stage 3. Nevertheless, because teachers have become more adept at using assessment information they now generally set activities that meet pupils' specific needs and challenge them to improve. Higher expectations of pupils in the Stephenson Centre and improvements in the management of behaviour are leading to more pupils being able to take a range of accredited courses, including level 2 qualifications such as GCSEs.

External support

Leaders secured support quickly from a range of agencies to help address weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection and to move the school forward. The external reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding have supported the development of more effective governance and much more rigorous procedures in monitoring the use and effectiveness of pupil premium funding. Commissioned human resource services have ensured more robust safer recruitment procedures. Support from the local authority safeguarding officer for schools has supported leaders in ensuring that all aspects of safeguarding are secure and in developing plans to make them the best they can be.

Some commissioned services have been less tenacious in pointing out improvements. For example, the reviewer of physical restraint in school suggested, but did not assert strongly enough, what the school needed to do to improve procedures. One safeguarding reviewer provided only oral feedback, which was unhelpful to governors in understanding fully the findings of the review and the suggestions for the way forward.

Local authority officers have worked closely with leaders to develop clear admission criteria for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. This is to ensure that Beaumont Hill does not become a proxy pupil referral unit for pupils at risk of exclusion or who have been permanently excluded. Local authority officers have also worked with the school to identify specialist alternative provision for a small group of older pupils. These pupils' severe behavioural needs are a significant barrier to their learning, not their social, emotional or mental health difficulties. Provision is monitored by the local authority and school staff check regularly to ensure that pupils are safe, attending and making gains in their education and social development. Staff check every day that pupils are attending and go out to their homes to help get them in to school if not.

The education development adviser, commissioned shortly after the inspection, provides insightful challenge and practical support. Support includes a thorough evaluation of teaching and learning, particularly in key stage 3. Robust checks and challenge on the school's own written evaluation of its work take place regularly. The education development adviser's reports provide a frank and honest evaluation of what is working well and what needs to improve further. These reports provide governors with a clear and objective external view of the school's current effectiveness.