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28 September 2017

Ms Clare Verga
Highbury Grove School
8 Highbury Grove
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Dear Ms Verga

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highbury Grove School

Following my visit with Patricia Slonecki and James Whiting, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 12–13 September 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 December 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 local authority’s statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school’s action plans are fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Islington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carolyn Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

■ Leaders must:

- establish a consistently well-ordered environment so that pupils behave well, attend well, are safe and can learn without interruption
- ensure that their judgements about standards across the school are accurate and are based on rigorous, reliable monitoring systems
- support and challenge teachers to improve their practice so that all pupils and groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, make good progress across the range of subjects.

■ Teachers should:

- consistently apply the school's behaviour management policies at all times
- ensure that they challenge and engage pupils more effectively, particularly in mathematics, so that they make good progress across all year groups and subjects
- demonstrate high expectations of all pupils to encourage positive attitudes and rapid progress
- offer appropriate literacy support to pupils who need it.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2017 to 13 September 2017

Evidence

This first monitoring inspection focused on the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding and pupils' behaviour. Inspectors met with the executive principal, senior leaders with responsibility for aspects of the school's strategies for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority and sponsor trust. Inspectors also met with groups of staff, including middle leaders and new staff, and four groups of pupils from Years 7 to 11. Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons, at changeover between lessons, during break and lunchtime and as pupils arrived and left the school. The inspection team visited the inclusion room and the medical room. Documentation scrutinised included: external reviews of safeguarding and attendance; the statement of action and the school's action plans; policies and procedures relating to the behaviour and safety of pupils; behaviour and attendance information; records of plans and actions to support vulnerable pupils; the single central record of pre-employment checks made on staff and a sample of staff files; the welfare (medical and accident) log.

Context

Since the last inspection, the local authority and a local multi-academy trust (City of London Academies Trust, COLAT) have worked together on transition arrangements to convert the school to an academy, due to complete in the autumn term 2017. A service level agreement is in place enabling COLAT to operate within the school from September 2017. A new principal and executive principal have been appointed. By September 2017, a total of 34 new staff joined the school, including those replacing staff who have left.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have taken swift action to establish a well-ordered environment in which pupils behave well. As a result, both pupils and staff report that they feel safe in school. Early improvements to the organisation of pupils at lunchtime and zoning of the school to enable middle leaders to take responsibility for behaviour in their subject areas have quickly improved corridor behaviour. Pupils now move around the school calmly; communication between themselves and with teachers is respectful.

Since September 2017, the new executive principal has introduced additional strategies to ensure that staff and pupils all have a common understanding of behaviour expectations. Staff report that they feel confident in the application of the new behaviour system due to the strong leadership of the executive principal and

the high-quality training received. Inspectors observed consistent use of behaviour routines in most lessons with only a small number of teachers not yet using the new system effectively. New routines introduced this term to improve an orderly and punctual start to lessons are effective. Pupils line up at the start of the day, end of break and end of lunch and are led into lessons by their teachers. As a result, lessons start promptly for all pupils; records show that internal truancy is no longer a feature in the school.

Attendance for all groups of pupils remains below the national average. An experienced education welfare officer from the City of London Academy Islington supports the newly appointed education welfare officer. The impact of this appointment, together with improved registration procedures and the rigorous follow-up of absent pupils, have not yet been evaluated. Currently, high absence levels and late arrival to school for many pupils remains an area that requires urgent attention by school leaders.

The interim governing body are aware of their responsibility to monitor the implementation and evaluation of the action plan and the need to receive accurate and timely information from the senior leaders. External reviews of governance and the school's use of pupil premium funding have not taken place.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' personal development and welfare have improved because leaders have introduced effective strategies to improve behaviour. Expectations for pupil conduct around school are high. Equally, expectations for staff have been raised in how they set and follow the same straightforward routines. The Remind, Warning, Detention (RWD) system is clearly understood by pupils and staff. Pupils report that they value the clarity of the system and consistency of implementation by staff. Pupils also told inspectors that staff have more respect for them and that they now use praise to reward pupils. Leaders have introduced a new protocol for positive conversations that is improving relationships. Inspectors noted that pupils behaved well on arrival at school and departure from school as well as during lunch and breaktimes. Staff stuck to the protocols and pupils were compliant with staff instructions.

The introduction this September of mixed-age tutor groups has improved the integration of pupils from different backgrounds, ages and abilities. Year 7 pupils spoke enthusiastically to inspectors about the benefits of mixed-aged tutor groups. They enjoyed the support received from older pupils in their induction and felt the school was well organised.

Pupils reported that they knew who to report to with any concerns and felt there had been a reduction in bullying incidents. However, they also said that should incidents occur some pupils would not feel confident in reporting to designated staff. The newly appointed Heads of Year are aware of the need to further gain the

confidence of all pupils. New systems, such as email reporting for pupils, are in place but their impact has yet to be measured. Leaders are currently redeveloping the system for logging and analysing behaviour incidents. This means that leaders are currently unable to assess fully the effect of the strategies to improve behaviour. Leaders deal with extreme incidents appropriately, sometimes by using exclusion.

During the inspection, it was discovered that some pupils did not have access to required medication. Swift and urgent action by leaders ensured that the situation was corrected.

External support

Following the last inspection, the local authority and COLAT moved swiftly to secure a safe environment for pupils. The local authority completed an external review of both safeguarding and attendance. These reviews provided useful feedback.