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17 April 2018

Mr Robert Jones  
Principal  
RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning  
Wheelwright Lane  
Coventry  
West Midlands  
CV7 9RA

Dear Mr Jones

**Special measures monitoring inspection of RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning**

Following my visit to your school with Simon Mosley, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 20 and 21 March 2018, 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 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

the school should not 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 Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2017**

- As a matter of urgency, improve safeguarding and ensure that:
  - all concerns have been followed up with rigour and no pupils remain at risk from harm
  - coherent systems are in place which enable safeguarding leaders to have a comprehensive oversight of all aspects of safeguarding in the school
  - leaders keep accessible, detailed and accurate records of safeguarding concerns
  - concerns about members of staff are managed and recorded accurately, and external agencies are notified appropriately
  - concerns reported by staff are sufficiently detailed and are dealt with in a timely way.
- The proprietor and governors should take urgent action to improve the capacity of leadership and management by:
  - recruiting a substantive leadership team, including for the 16 to 19 programmes of study so that leaders are able to work more strategically and plan for the future
  - providing greater challenge and support to leaders, ensuring that pupils are set challenging targets that enable them to make good or better progress.
- Improve leadership and management of the school by:
  - developing a more accurate self-evaluation of the school which is closely matched to improvement priorities
  - developing more rigorous processes for managing staff performance
  - further developing links between home and school so that there is a consistent approach to pupils' learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
  - all staff receive training in the education of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties so that pupils' learning needs can be met more effectively
  - the new assessment system is embedded and used to plan lessons that are well-suited to pupils' needs, with targets that are appropriately challenging
  - pupils make accelerated progress in mathematics and science so that it matches that seen in English.

- Improve behaviour and pupils' personal development by ensuring that:
  - leaders adopt a more rigorous approach to the analysis of behaviours and use this information to inform practice
  - behaviour plans are developed collaboratively and updated regularly, and are followed consistently by all staff
  - the use of physical interventions is recorded in a detailed and accurate way so that records cannot be open to misuse, and their use is monitored closely by leaders.

An external review of governance, with a specific focus on safeguarding, should be undertaken to establish how this area of leadership and management can be strengthened.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 20 to 21 March 2018**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with the principal, the interim deputy headteacher and the two assistant headteachers. Discussions took place with the designated safeguarding leader and one of the deputy designated safeguarding leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of safeguarding documents. Inspectors spoke to staff both formally and informally. They spoke to pupils informally. The lead inspector spoke via telephone to the chair of governors and the school's improvement partner. There were no parents and carers available to speak to the inspection team, but inspectors considered the school's own records of the school's engagement with parents.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes to the leadership team. The previous acting headteacher is no longer in post and a principal has been appointed. He has been working in an interim capacity at the school since December 2017 and will take up his substantive role on a full-time basis from September 2018. Until then, his responsibilities are split between two schools. To ensure there is capacity for improvement, an interim deputy headteacher has recently been appointed to the school. The two temporary assistant headteachers have been appointed to permanent roles in the school, with responsibilities for the curriculum, assessment, and the school's 16 to 19 programmes of study. One part-time teacher is due to retire at the end of term. There is now a school improvement partner working with the school.

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

The appointment of the new principal and the reform of the leadership team is proving to be a turning point for the school. The principal has ensured that there is now a clarity of direction and transparency within the school. Staff speak very positively about the impact of the changes in leadership, the better communication and the resulting improvements that are taking place. The school no longer works in isolation and is engaging with a purpose with local support networks, including the Coventry special schools group and the Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull regional moderation group. A school improvement partner has begun working with the school and is supporting the governing body in developing explicit terms of reference. This will enable governors to establish clear lines of accountability and responsibility with the proprietary body, the RNIB, so that the school can improve further. Leaders are now working with post-16 providers in the area for guidance in improving the quality of the post-16 provision at RNIB Pears.

The statement of action that the school was required to submit to Ofsted was judged to be not fit for purpose. However, after in-depth discussion between the principal and the lead inspector, changes have subsequently been made. The revised statement of action has been reviewed and is now judged to be fit for purpose. The principal's additional planned activities complement the statement of action and aim to bring about further improvements in the school.

Governors are now being provided with information about the school that enables them to challenge leaders effectively. They value the weekly bulletin they receive from the principal. The chair of the governing body has spent time in school meeting with leaders and visiting classes. As a result, he has a better understanding of the school's priorities for further improvement. All governors are now provided with up-to-date information about all aspects of the school's improvement journey. As a result, they can be in no doubt about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are now better placed to ask more searching questions of leaders. Governors are also engaging with the National Governance Association to help them develop their roles further.

Leaders and governors have rightly prioritised changes to the safeguarding arrangements for the school to ensure more rigorous oversight than existed at the time of the previous inspection. It is unfortunate that the planned safeguarding review was cancelled at the last minute, so this is still an outstanding action. However, the principal has taken swift action and has made alternative arrangements to ensure that the review takes place as a matter of urgency. Leaders have carried out an audit to ensure that no pupils are at immediate risk of harm. In addition, they have used the audit as an opportunity to identify 'lessons learned', to enable them to improve safeguarding practice in the future.

Leaders have strengthened the safeguarding team within the school. They have emphasised the importance of safeguarding, and the role that every member of staff plays in keeping pupils safe from harm. Safeguarding posters and information are displayed prominently throughout the school. Staff are clear about what they should do if they are worried about a child, and to whom they should report concerns. Staff attend frequent safeguarding briefings, as well as receiving information sheets about different aspects of safeguarding, such as whistle-blowing. Consequently, staff are confident about what they should do if they have any concerns about other adults.

Leaders have recognised that the proprietor's current safeguarding policy does not address the school's and local area's circumstances and needs sufficiently. As a result, they have drafted a comprehensive and personalised safeguarding policy for the school, taking into account statutory duties and local area procedures. Ratification of this policy will further strengthen the school's safeguarding arrangements.

A new, accessible system for recording and monitoring all safeguarding and behaviour concerns is in its final stages of development and is due to be launched very shortly. Some records have already been transferred to the new system, and leaders now have a much clearer picture of concerns and emerging trends. While leaders are now following up incidents with urgency, the checking of the quality of reporting of incidents is not as rigorous as it could be. Leaders recognised during the inspection that during this period of transition, concern forms need to be monitored even more closely until the launch of the new system. Leaders have planned additional training for staff to ensure they understand how to use the new reporting system and how to record incidents accurately.

Leaders have ensured that robust procedures are in place for the transfer and storage of medication in school. Pupils' care plans clearly state individual care and medication needs. While not putting pupils at risk of harm, the current system for recording medication transfer between home and school needs improving because it is a loose-leaf system. As a result, some records could be lost or become disorganised.

The principal recognises that staff have not had the opportunity to work with other professionals to develop their skills in teaching pupils who have complex needs. As a result, leaders have introduced a comprehensive range of professional development opportunities across the organisation. A bespoke training package, facilitated through the local teaching alliance, has been planned. Senior leaders are benefiting from visiting and working with other professionals across the country. Teachers are beginning a 'buddy' system, working alongside teachers in other schools with pupils who have similar complex needs. Teaching assistants will also benefit from these opportunities. Staff to whom inspectors spoke talked enthusiastically about the training opportunities that had been planned for them. Leaders are planning to bring in additional coaching and mentoring support for teachers in the future. Much of this work is at an early stage of development, so its impact cannot yet be seen.

A small number of parents have expressed concerns about the decline in overall standards at the school. They feel that their children may not be getting the support they need, as outlined in their education, health and care plans. Leaders have revised their annual review procedures so that any concerns expressed by parents can be addressed and plans reviewed carefully.

Leaders have improved home to school communication by reintroducing home-school diaries for pupils. Pupils' educational targets are now being aligned with health and therapy targets, to allow for greater continuity between home and school. However, it is too early to see the impact of these actions.

The principal understands the importance of holding teachers to account for their performance. He has introduced a new system to manage teachers' performance. While interim performance appraisals have been planned, they have not yet taken

place. Leaders also value the work of teaching assistants but recognise that, currently, there is no similar system of managing performance for this group of staff.

Leaders have taken the decision to review their school curriculum as they feel it is not meeting pupils' needs as effectively as it should. The assistant headteacher is leading the curriculum review, working with schools that support pupils who have similar needs to those at RNIB Pears Centre.

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

As was the case at the previous inspection, strong and supportive relationships are evident between staff and pupils. Where teaching is effective, pupils are engaged in their learning, developing new skills, knowledge and understanding to apply in different situations. Inspectors saw pupils learning how to use kitchen equipment safely while preparing toast, being encouraged to work as independently as possible. Pupils were making choices about their toast toppings and their enjoyment of learning was clear to see. Another group of pupils, at an early stage of development, experienced a sensory story to good effect. Staff used clear, repetitive language and pupils enjoyed a range of sensory experiences to engage and reinforce the language used.

Leaders' plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning are crucial in securing higher standards across the school. Currently, teaching is still not of consistently high quality in all classes in the school. While observing with senior leaders, inspectors saw several lessons that had little impact on pupils' learning. Some pupils are not provided with suitable resources, or sit waiting for their turn because insufficient resources have been provided. In some lessons, teachers use complex language and, as a result, pupils are not engaged in the activities at a level appropriate to their needs.

Teaching assistants are skilled in caring for pupils' welfare and medical needs. They manage pupils' hoist transfers and medical procedures sensitively and appropriately during lessons. However, the support pupils receive in learning activities is less consistent. Some teaching assistants are not confident in supporting pupils' learning. Although classes are very well staffed, teaching assistants are not clear about their roles. As they have not received sufficient training or direction, they sit alongside their allocated pupil, with little interaction or engagement taking place.

The assistant headteacher with responsibility for assessment has a good understanding of the school's assessment information. She has ensured that information about pupils' performance is analysed more closely. As a result, staff can now look at patterns and trends in information to see where pupils may need additional support. Pupil progress meetings are now taking place, and additional help for those pupils who need it is now planned and targeted. These meetings have only recently begun so it is too early to see the impact on pupils' outcomes.



Teachers have now begun to check their judgements about pupils' work, both in school and with other schools in the area. Records show that teachers are making accurate judgements. As a result of improving links with other schools in the area, more teachers will have the opportunity to engage in external moderation of pupils' work in the future.

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

The introduction of the new system for recording all concerns about pupils' welfare includes the tracking of behaviour incidents. Leaders recognise the benefit and accessibility of the system in helping them to identify trends in behaviour. Staff are due to be trained in its use early next term. Currently, there is limited analysis of behaviours in school.

There has been an improvement in the way in which behaviour plans are developed. Half-termly meetings now take place with staff and the behaviour nurse. Plans are reviewed every three to six months, and risk assessments for all pupils have been reviewed and updated. Staff are now able to access the most recent behaviour plans. The use of the safe spaces in school has been reviewed and a revised guide has been shared with staff. Since the last inspection, safe spaces have not been used.

Physical interventions continue to be recorded on the current proforma, but this will transfer to the new recording system in the very near future. Leaders are monitoring more closely the use of physical interventions, and have recognised a need to enhance staff training in this area.

Pupils' attendance has declined since the last inspection, but analysis of information shows genuine medical reasons for this. Leaders are now addressing pupils' late arrival to school, and the slow start to lessons.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Since the last inspection, assessment information shows that pupils are making better progress in mathematics and science than they were previously. However, current information indicates that pupils are not making as much progress in communication and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Leaders have responded to this analysis quickly and made changes to class timetables to provide more frequent communication-based activities. Leaders acknowledge that the current assessment system needs further refinement. For example, the system is not capturing the small steps of progress pupils are making in PSHE, or pupils' overall progress in science in a meaningful way. Additionally, the school's current delivery of the curriculum means that some areas of learning are not formally taught for a term. In mathematics, the current focus is on shape, space and measure, with no reference to number during this term.

## **External support**

Leaders and governors are now benefiting from active engagement with external providers, which until recently did not happen. As well as the developing work with the school improvement partner, an external consultant will begin working with the school next term for three days a week, developing teaching and learning across the school. Leaders are enabling staff to develop working links with other special schools in the area, to improve standards in the school. The local teaching alliance will be providing bespoke training on all aspects of school improvement. Much of this work is still at an early stage of development; its impact will be evident at the next monitoring inspection.