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Miss Lisa Corrigan
Principal
Park Lane Learning Trust
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Dear Miss Corrigan

No formal designation inspection of Park Lane Learning Trust

Following my visit with Andrew Swallow and Matthew West, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 27 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned that the school had not converted to an academy despite the judgement that it required special measures in March 2016. The focus of the inspection was the impact of the actions taken by leaders and managers to address the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection in March 2016.

Evidence

Inspectors visited a number of lessons covering a range of subjects. Many lesson visits were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work. The inspection team scrutinised a range of documents during the inspection, including: safeguarding and child protection documents, the record of suitability checks on staff, external reviews, governing body minutes, the school improvement plan, school self-evaluation documents, and attendance and pupil progress information. Inspectors also took into consideration the 69 responses to the Ofsted online parent survey, Parent View, e-mail correspondence from parents and a phone call from a parent.

An inspector held a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. An inspector met with the chief executive officer of South Pennine Academies.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that:

leaders and managers are not taking effective actions towards the removal of special measures.

Context

Park Lane Learning Trust is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is also above the national average. Increasing numbers of pupils are joining the school at times other than at the start of the school year.

Since the section 5 inspection in March 2016, a number of teachers have left the school. This has led to the recruitment of temporary teachers. The principal has appointed new staff to fill the vacancies. They will take up their posts in April and September 2018. New middle leaders for English, science and modern foreign languages will join the school in April 2018.

At the time of this monitoring visit, two years following the judgement of special measures, sponsor arrangements are yet to be finalised. South Pennine Academies is currently providing support for the school. This has included the appointment of a new principal from the trust in May 2017.

Inspection findings

Since the last inspection, the overall pace of school improvement has been too slow, to the detriment of pupils. Under the leadership of the new principal, with the support from South Pennine Academies, leaders are taking decisive action to more urgently address the areas for improvement. As a result, behaviour is beginning to improve and more effective systems are in place to evaluate the impact of the school's work on improving pupils' progress.

After the last inspection, governors commissioned a review of funding to support disadvantaged pupils. They also commissioned a review of governance. Governors have not sufficiently addressed the recommendations from both these reviews. Governors have not challenged school leaders effectively about the progress of pupils who benefit from pupil premium funding. As a result, in 2017 outcomes for disadvantaged pupils remained in the bottom 10% nationally. Governors' minutes show that they do not challenge leaders effectively. They have not ensured that the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been actioned with urgency.

The new principal has restructured the senior leadership team. Clear lines of accountability are now in place. Current leaders are very clear about the work needed to improve all aspects of the school in order to fully address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. More effective quality assurance procedures are in place to check and evaluate the school's work. Middle leaders are increasingly held to account. They talk positively about the changes introduced in recent months. Middle leaders feel well-supported in their roles. Quality training, and additional support for middle leaders, is beginning to ensure that they more effectively check the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils from their different starting points.

The new principal has a clear vision for improving the school. The staff spoken to by inspectors are buoyant in their attitudes. They are fully behind the principal's vision for improvement, despite the challenges faced in recent years. Staff appreciate the recent professional development, including opportunities to share effective practice with teachers from other schools in the trust.

In November 2017, leaders initiated a full curriculum review. This has led to a more appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. Leaders developed the new curriculum in consultation with employers from across the region to ensure a focus on preparing pupils for life beyond school. A part of the curriculum offer is the 'Park Lane Pledge'. This aims to give every pupil the opportunity to learn British sign language, achieve a first aid qualification and provide the opportunity for pupils to join the cadets. Some pupils and parents are unhappy with the new curriculum. Leaders are aware of the need to continue to regularly review the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils.

Leaders have recently introduced more effective plans to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up. These plans clearly identify the barriers to learning for these pupils. Leaders are aware of the need to ensure that the impact of actions is evaluated more thoroughly so that disadvantaged pupils, and those in need of catch up, make better progress.

On her appointment, the principal quickly established that provision was not effective for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Therefore, she commissioned a full review of special educational needs provision. Leaders are currently addressing the recommendations from this review. This includes making sure that all staff effectively plan to meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities by ensuring that strategies identified to support pupils, in their individual education plans, are implemented fully. Some parents express concern that staff do not consistently follow individual education plans.

Since the previous inspection, there has been turbulence in staffing. Pupils and parents express concern that this is having a detrimental impact on pupils' learning and progress. The new principal has tackled underperformance and has appointed new staff. Many take up their posts in April 2018. However, the quality and

consistency of teaching has not improved sufficiently since the last section 5 inspection. Expectations of what pupils should and can achieve are still not high enough. Pupils have developed poor learning habits in some subjects as a result of teachers' expectations being too low. When teachers' expectations are high, pupils rise to the challenge and they are fully engaged in their learning. Pupils' presentation and pride in their work is too variable. Leaders are now addressing this with the introduction of 'non-negotiables'. Ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching has been challenging due to the high turnover of staff and number of temporary teachers. However, leaders are aware that with more stability in staffing after Easter, the quality of teaching must be addressed with more urgency to ensure that pupils receive a consistent experience.

Pupils told inspectors that since the appointment of the new principal, behaviour has improved. Expectations of behaviour have risen. The new behaviour policy, introduced in November 2017, is beginning to have an impact. As a result, the number of behaviour incidents and fixed-term exclusions have reduced. However, leaders acknowledge that exclusions remain too high. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour remains an issue in some lessons, particularly when they have temporary teachers. Corridor behaviour has improved. However, inspectors observed some boisterous behaviour by younger pupils.

The pupils that inspectors talked to during the inspection told inspectors that bullying does not happen often. They are confident to tell an adult if they have any concerns. However, some parents, in response to the online Ofsted survey, Parent View, express concern that teachers do not always deal with bullying effectively. Some pupils told inspectors that although staff deal with bullying incidents, sometimes they do not deal with incidents quickly enough.

Pupils' attendance remains too low. Persistent absence is high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are tackling this with urgency. Actions to increase attendance are beginning to show some improvement, for example in improving the attendance of Year 7 pupils. The new principal has raised the profile of attendance across the school. However, attendance rates for Year 10 and 11 pupils, in particular, continue to remain well below the national average.

The vast majority of pupils follow the school's uniform expectations. Pupils look smart in their uniforms. Pupils were polite and courteous to inspectors. They are confident to share and express their views.

At the previous section 5 inspection, although safeguarding was effective, an area for improvement was to improve the quality of multi-agency work. Leaders have fully addressed this. They ensure detailed recording of events and actions. Leaders regularly review plans to support vulnerable pupils. Targets to support pupils are clear and specific. Leaders are persistent and tenacious in following up any referrals made to other agencies.

In 2017, pupils made poor progress in their GCSE examinations. The progress made by pupils was significantly below the national average in English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities. Outcomes for all groups of pupils were in the bottom 10% nationally. Disadvantaged pupils made particularly poor progress across their GCSE subjects. Leaders have introduced more effective systems to regularly check pupils' progress. Moderation of assessment is now in place across the secondary schools within the trust. This is helping to improve accuracy of teachers' assessments. School information shows that current Year 10 and 11 pupils are making better progress this year. However, leaders recognise the need for more accelerated progress to ensure that outcomes are more in line with national averages.

External support

Support for the school, before South Pennine Academies took on the day-to-day running of the school, had not been effective in halting the decline in standards after the last inspection. Since May 2017, South Pennine Academies has provided a range of support for the school, including the appointment of a new principal and the support from specialist leaders of education in English, mathematics and humanities. The chief executive officer of the trust is regularly in school supporting the work of the senior leadership team. This support is beginning to show positive impact on school improvement. Green shoots of improvement are evident. However, leaders recognise that there is still much work to do to ensure the removal of special measures.

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

Yours sincerely

Michele Costello
Her Majesty's Inspector