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Robert Jones
Interim Executive Headteacher
RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning
Wheelwright Lane
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Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning

Following my visit with Jane Edgerton, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 10 to 11 July 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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 school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may 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 second monitoring inspection on 10 to 11 July 2018

Evidence

Inspectors visited lessons in all classes, usually accompanied by senior leaders. They met with the interim executive headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of evidence relating to safeguarding and met with the designated safeguarding leader (DSL), who is also the acting deputy headteacher. Inspectors considered a wide range of school documentation, pupils' work and pupil records. They met with groups of teachers and teaching assistants formally and spoke to staff informally during the inspection. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body, the safeguarding governor and another governing body member. Inspectors spoke via telephone to the newly appointed head of regulated services, education, care and safeguarding for the RNIB. The lead inspector spoke to the school's improvement partner by telephone. The team inspector met with the behaviour nurse. There were too few responses to consider on Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been additional changes to the leadership team. The team is currently in a state of flux. The principal has now rescinded his role and is currently working in an interim capacity as the executive headteacher across this and another school within the RNIB organisation. This new role is yet to be formalised and the current contractual obligations of the executive headteacher towards this school are unclear. The acting deputy headteacher has taken on a nominal head of school role but this too has not been formalised and he remains on a fixed-term contract. There are two teachers on long-term supply at the school. Two members of the governing body have resigned as they have completed their term of office. One new governor has been recruited and a parent governor is also due to join the governing body.

Within the wider organisation, the chief executive officer has resigned and an interim officer is in place. A director of care, education and safeguarding has recently been appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Current safeguarding practice in the school is not effective. The weaknesses in staff's practice and leaders' oversight of this area are putting pupils at risk of serious harm. This is unacceptable. Despite two separate safeguarding reviews and increased training for staff in safeguarding, several safeguarding concerns emerged during the inspection. Although leaders have improved their systems for recording safeguarding concerns, they have not carried out the required checks to ensure that staff are following the school's policy and procedures for recording, reporting and

storing information. As a result, some staff are still using the previous recording system, as well as not making the DSLs aware of concerns about pupils' welfare. Some records of concern are being sent home. Others are being stored in class files and are not recorded on the school's recording system. Some staff are making duplicate copies of concerns. While staff were able to talk confidently to inspectors about the additional safeguarding training they have received, they have not adopted a common-sense approach to safeguarding in their day-to-day practice. The way incidents are recorded shows that some staff are not clear about what is or is not a safeguarding concern. After these issues were brought to leaders' attention, leaders took urgent action to begin addressing them.

Leaders' actions to improve the school are still being hampered by the legacy of the corporate systems which operate within the organisation. On one hand, leaders have taken decisive action in their introduction of an online reporting system for all aspects of safeguarding and behaviour as they recognised that action needed to be taken urgently to improve the previously weak arrangements. However, senior RNIB officers have recently selected a new approach to managing physical interventions and the de-escalation of behaviour across the organisation. They did this without any consultation with school leaders or governors. As a result, they have not established whether this system is fit for purpose for use with these vulnerable pupils. The organisation is now beginning to make changes to their systems but these are currently in a state of transition.

Leaders have ensured that the required review of governance with a focus on safeguarding has now been completed. Since the last visit, they have also commissioned an additional safeguarding review, which has now been completed. As a result, an action plan has been written to further improve areas of weakness and some progress has been made in achieving these targets. However, the reviews did not look at operational activities or the implementation of safeguarding practice in the school. In addition, an external review of governance has recently been undertaken but the outcome of this review has not yet been received by the school.

Leaders' self-evaluation of the school is now more accurate and is informing their revised action plans. They are analysing information about incidents of inappropriate behaviour with increasing rigour and beginning to share this information with governors. Consequently, governors now have a better understanding of the areas of strength and weakness within the school. Both leaders and governors recognise that governors have had limited involvement in developing the school's self-evaluation and subsequent action plans. They plan to improve their collaboration and engagement in the next term.

Governors have completed some additional safeguarding and governance training, with more scheduled for the autumn term. It is too early to see the impact of this training. They have liaised with the governing body of a local multi-academy trust to gain a better perspective of a model of strong governance. A professional clerking service is capturing governors' challenge and decision-making in a more accurate

way. While governors' capacity is improving, they still need to recruit to vacant posts. Governors are aware that they are still over-reliant on evidence presented to them by leaders. As a result, they have planned additional monitoring activities for the new school year to check for themselves on the work of the school.

Leaders previously recognised that the curriculum was not fit for purpose and, as a result, have been trialling two new personalised curriculum models in one class. The revised models provide a more suitable curriculum which is better suited to meet the pupils' complex needs. They plan to implement these models across the rest of the school from September 2018. Leaders are also reviewing their assessment system to ensure that it complements the new curriculum. Staff have not yet received training and development in the understanding and implementation of the new curriculum model. The personal, social and health education element of the existing curriculum is not meeting pupils' needs and is currently being reviewed by the wider organisation. However, school leaders were not involved in the initial discussions about the development of the curriculum because RNIB officers planned the initial meeting in the school holidays. Leaders are now beginning to take a more active role in this work.

Staff are now being given the opportunity to visit different schools to observe models of good practice. However, these visits are not yet having an impact on resulting classroom practice. Leaders are now carrying out checks on the quality of teaching and learning. However, these are currently limited to classroom observations and leaders' evaluations of teaching and learning appear overgenerous. Planned professional development opportunities for staff do not dedicate sufficient time and emphasis to improving the quality of teaching and learning. For example, although staff have completed a self-review of their skills and are able to participate in a series of online training modules, leaders have not yet checked whether staff's assessment of their skills are reflected in their practice. During the inspection, leaders thought more about their professional development programme. Consequently, governors agreed to an additional two days of training to enable leaders to plan training to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have a clear vision for developing the post-16 provision in the school. They have reviewed the staffing of this department, as well as the curriculum and accompanying accreditation. Consequently, the provision is likely to support students' educational and vocational needs more effectively if the school's vision for improvement is implemented effectively in September 2018. Accreditation is to be refined and the courses which students are to follow in the new school year appear to be better suited to their needs and abilities.

Leaders have recently established a new 'parent participation group' as a way of improving communication between parents and carers and the school. However, the initial invitation was not extended to all parents. Communication systems between home and school are weak. Leaders have now recognised this and plan to introduce a 'home-to-school' diary from September 2018.

Staff continue to speak positively about the leadership of the school and feel that leaders are instilling confidence in the wider staff team. Staff appreciate the guidance they receive from leaders and value the recent professional development opportunities in which they have participated, especially recent visits to other local schools.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning remain. Staff usually manage pupils' behaviour well but, when activities are not well matched to pupils' sensory needs and abilities, pupils become less engaged in their learning. Some activities, such as food tasting, were well supported and engaged pupils' senses of touch, taste, hearing and smell. Conversely, inspectors saw some resources being used which were not suitable for pupils for health and safety reasons, particularly for those pupils who engage in exploratory play by mouthing objects or who seek sensory stimulation through self-injurious behaviour. Inspectors also saw staff using some resources which were not well matched to pupils' abilities and sensory needs. Some activities did not extend pupils' learning in a meaningful or accessible way.

The high staff-to-pupil ratio means that pupils are usually well supported in class. Staff clearly know pupils well and help them in a caring and sensitive way. However, in some classes, teaching assistants are less clear about how they can support and extend pupils' learning effectively because activities are not planned well. Some activities are slow to start and, on several occasions, staff members were observed sitting alongside pupils passively, waiting for another pupil to join the group. This issue was highlighted during the last monitoring visit.

The recently introduced learning journals being trialled in one class and the recording of pupils' achievements via the online assessment system provide some evidence of pupils' progress over time. However, there are weaknesses with both approaches because the annotation of pupils' work by some staff does not provide an accurate picture of what pupils have achieved. As a result, the evidence produced does not enable leaders to make reliable judgements about pupils' progress. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for assessment recognises that staff require further training to improve their accuracy of reporting of pupils' achievements.

Teachers have begun moderating their judgements about the standard of pupils' work in collaboration with other schools. This external moderation, based on a discrete sample of pupils' work submitted at the time, suggested that teachers' judgements were accurate. However, the compelling evidence seen by inspectors, and agreed with the assessment leader, indicates that teachers are not routinely making accurate judgements about pupils' achievements over time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have introduced a new online system which provides a clear format for staff to record any concerns about pupils' safeguarding, behaviour or welfare. While staff's understanding and use of the system need to improve, leaders are now analysing emerging patterns of information from these records and beginning to take actions to address these trends. Records show that the use of physical interventions is reducing over time. Pupils' attendance has also improved since the last visit and leaders follow up any pupil absences with rigour.

While the frequency of review of behaviour plans has improved, plans and corresponding risk assessments are in a format which is not easily accessible to staff. There are inconsistencies in the quality of information in the documents and a lack of detail about the type of physical interventions likely to be used to support pupils. Inspectors found no evidence that plans are developed collaboratively with parents. However, staff report that they themselves are more actively involved in contributing to the plans. Currently, the process for writing behaviour plans is overly reliant on one member of health staff, who spends limited time in classrooms because she is constrained by administrative tasks. As a result, there are few opportunities for the analysis of the reasons behind pupils' behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes remain variable across all subjects. Leaders have taken appropriate action to stop subjects such as chemistry and biology being taught to pupils who have complex needs. Assessment information shows that progress in reading is stronger than progress in other subjects. Progress in science lags behind that seen in other subjects. Information about the performance of pupils who have the most complex needs suggests that their progress is limited. However, leaders need to be clearer about how they judge the progress of this group of pupils. Leaders intend to update their progress information before the end of the summer term, which will provide a more accurate picture of how much progress pupils are making.

External support

Leaders' engagement of an external consultant to develop teaching and learning across the school has not had the required impact. This is because leaders decided to use her expertise to support the curriculum leader to develop the new personalised curriculum. The school improvement partner continues to provide additional support for the school but this has focused primarily on leadership and governance. She has supported leaders to develop a more accurate self-evaluation of the school and the subsequent revised action plan. She is now chairing the newly formed school improvement board, which will allow governors to focus on the implementation of the action plan. A local authority representative has been invited

to sit on the improvement board but, currently, there is no other external scrutiny of the school's work.