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25 September 2018

Ms Emma Robins
Acting Headteacher
Graham School
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North Yorkshire
YO12 6QW

Dear Ms Robins

Special measures monitoring inspection of Graham School

Following my visit with Louise Greatrex, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12–13 September 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 May 2017.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to one additional newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dimitris Spiliotis

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of safeguarding by:
 - carrying out the necessary risk assessments and child protection checks of work experience placements for vulnerable pupils
 - monitoring closely the whereabouts of any pupils on reduced timetables and making sure that vulnerable pupils are safe while in the care of the school
 - limiting use of reduced timetables for vulnerable pupils
 - making sure that methods for reporting and recording emerging safeguarding concerns are clear and well understood by all staff
 - making sure that the management of information about safeguarding concerns and case files enables key staff to identify promptly emerging patterns of behaviour and to review accurately the history of a case.
- Promote high standards of behaviour and reduce the incidence of low-level disruption in classes by:
 - establishing clear expectations and procedures for behaviour
 - ensuring that all staff implement these consistently.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders are equally effective in managing the curriculum and the quality of teaching and assessment
 - reducing the use of temporary teachers and improving the management of temporary teachers to ensure continuity and quality of learning
 - ensuring that weaker teachers have the skills and support to enable them to manage behaviour more securely
 - raising teachers' expectations of what low- and middle-ability pupils can achieve
 - improving the presentation of, and pride in, pupils' work.
- Improve the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils by implementing targeted strategies that result in measurable improvements by disadvantaged pupils.
- Increase attendance and reduce persistent absence, especially by disadvantaged pupils and by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

External reviews of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2018 to 13 September 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised school documents, including safeguarding records, behaviour and attendance information and information around the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, executive leader, deputy headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the chair of the interim executive board and two governors, including the safeguarding governor. Inspectors also met with a representative from the local authority and representatives from the Hope Learning Trust, including the chief executive officer.

Inspectors spoke with middle leaders, a wide range of staff and pupils from Year 7 to Year 11. They observed teaching across a range of subjects. Some of these visits to classrooms were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised work in pupils' books, jointly with the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also talked informally with pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the school was last inspected, there have been a significant number of changes to staffing. An interim headteacher, a deputy headteacher, an assistant headteacher and an interim deputy headteacher were appointed in June 2017. By September 2018, 17 staff had left the school, including the interim headteacher, who secured a headship at another school.

The deputy headteacher is now acting headteacher, working closely with an executive leader from the Hope Learning Trust. The senior leadership team now consists of a new deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers. Leaders and governors have appointed new middle leaders with responsibility for mathematics and science. Since the last inspection, leaders have also appointed 10 new teaching staff, two new suitably trained staff, who cover for absent colleagues, three behaviour support workers and have created four new higher-level teaching assistant roles.

In November 2017, a new chair of the governing body was appointed. In September 2018, the local authority replaced the governing body with a new interim executive board. The school is at the final stages of the process to become an academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher, governors and the senior leadership team know well what

needs to improve at Graham School. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their school improvement plan focuses on the main priorities for improvement. Leaders have ensured that small measurable steps have been included so that their actions for impact can be monitored and evaluated. However, since the previous inspection the pace of change has not been rapid enough. Some improvements have been too slow. Consequently, many of the areas of weakness identified at the previous inspection remain main priorities for the school.

Since the last inspection, a review of governance has taken place. Due to difficulties in recruitment, a permanent chair was not appointed until November 2017. There was a delay in implementing the governance review recommendations and, as a result, the work of the governing body has had limited impact on whole-school improvement. Very recently, an interim executive board replaced the governing body and a number of skilled and experienced governors have been added. Governors now have a wide range of knowledge and expertise and they have a clear and focused vision about school improvement. They know better how to hold leaders to account and monitor closely the impact of their actions.

Safeguarding arrangements are now fit for purpose. Since the last inspection, leaders have strengthened the school's safeguarding procedures, including risk assessments for pupils attending alternative provision. Leaders also reviewed the number of pupils on reduced timetables by improving the support provided by school staff. As a result, currently only a very small number of pupils follow a reduced timetable. School leaders closely monitor the whereabouts of these pupils and the impact of the support provided to them.

Following the last inspection, leaders introduced an electronic system for recording and monitoring safeguarding information. All staff received clear guidance and training on using the new system and know what to do if they have any concerns. As a result, safeguarding records are now accurate and detailed. The safeguarding team closely monitor incidents and they make sure that any referrals to external agencies are timely and actions are followed up. The vast majority of pupils who inspectors spoke to during the inspection reported that they feel safe in school. Pupils could also describe what they must do to stay safe online.

In July 2017 and shortly after the last inspection, governors commissioned a pupil premium review. This helped school leaders to refocus their work with disadvantaged pupils. The school leader responsible for disadvantaged pupils implemented several targeted strategies, including personalised support for identified pupils and mentoring. There has been some positive impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils. The gap, however, between the progress of disadvantaged and other pupils remains too wide. There has been no significant impact on improving the attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

School leaders, including middle leaders, have worked closely with the executive leader from the Hope Learning Trust to review the curriculum. This has resulted in a curriculum provision that suits the needs of the pupils at the school and supports them to achieve their potential. The effectiveness of middle leaders in managing their curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning in their areas are variable but improving. Senior leaders provide appropriate support to develop middle leaders further, including external collaboration with subject directors from the Hope Learning Trust. Consequently, the confidence in middle leaders is growing.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the school is fully staffed in 2018. They have significantly reduced the use of supply teachers by improving staff absence and by strategically deploying support staff to cover for absent colleagues. As a result, there is more stability among staffing, and pupils commented positively on this change since the last inspection.

The recent appointment of the new deputy headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning is beginning to show some impact. Leaders have put in place robust systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning and linked it to pupils' outcomes. The introduction of the 'focus 5' initiative has increased accountability and raised the profile of the progress of disadvantaged pupils. There is a carefully planned programme of professional development to support staff. Staff appreciate the support and training that they receive in order to improve their practice.

Pupils are taking an increased pride in their work. This is evident from the improved quality of pupils' presentation in their workbooks. Where staff have high expectations in this, as in many other areas of the school's work, pupils respond to them. Leaders are aware that variability between departments remains and they are working rigorously to address this.

Although the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving, it remains too variable. Teachers increasingly use more challenging questions of pupils. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Activities in some lessons are not challenging enough. As a result, the progress that pupils make is not good enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the last inspection, and following the merging of two sites into one, school leaders introduced a revised behaviour policy in January 2018 and raised the expectations across the whole school. As a result, the conduct of pupils in lessons is improving. During the inspection, inspectors witnessed a calm and orderly atmosphere in most lessons. However, in some lessons, where the work is not challenging enough and relationships between staff and pupils are not strong, pupils

are compliant but not engaged with the learning.

Leaders have ensured that all staff have received appropriate training to manage behaviour in lessons more effectively. Some staff have built positive relationships with pupils and are successful at managing behaviour. However, there is too much variability across departments and staff. Leaders are aware of, and are working on, sharing good and effective practice as part of the professional development of staff. It is too soon to see the impact of this.

The conduct of pupils around the site, during breaktime and lunchtime, has not improved at the same rate. A small number of pupils choose to use inappropriate language or act inappropriately towards other pupils. Staff do not challenge this behaviour consistently. Senior leaders have a high presence around the site at all times, modelling good behaviour and reinforcing expectations.

The school has reviewed the use of the 'One Point' resource base to support pupils at risk of exclusion. The newly appointed behaviour support workers monitor the behaviour of pupils throughout the school day. Although leaders are recording a large amount of information on behaviour incidents, they do not analyse this precisely enough to evaluate the impact of their actions. The number of fixed-term exclusions increased significantly in 2018, including those of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are aware that they need to reduce fixed-term exclusions for all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, urgently.

Leaders recognise that they have made less progress in improving the attendance of all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils. Attendance is still not good enough and significantly below national average. School leaders have refined and improved the ways in which they check the attendance of different groups of pupils. Attendance staff work hard with pupils and families in order to improve attendance. Punctuality, for example, has improved. However, leaders' analysis of the attendance information is not precise enough to allow them to evaluate the impact of their strategies. Leaders are aware that they need to improve the attendance of all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, urgently.

Outcomes for pupils

The improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Provisional assessment information for 2018 indicates that pupils' progress, including disadvantaged pupils, improved compared to the previous year. The same assessment information indicates a slight improvement in the attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 4, including the disadvantaged pupils. However, the gaps between the disadvantaged pupils and their peers are still too wide. Inspection evidence, including scrutiny of pupils' work, confirms this.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have increased accountability and

developed systems to check pupils' progress and attainment. This enables leaders to review the outcomes of different groups of pupils. Monitoring of pupils' progress in different subjects is also improving. This is leading to the identification of pupils who need extra support to meet their target grades. The Hope Learning Trust is externally moderating school assessments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable. Current school assessment information indicates a more positive picture of sustained improvement in other year groups.

External support

The school receives support from the local authority and recently from the Hope Learning Trust. The executive leader appointed by the trust provides sharply focused challenge and support to the acting headteacher. A number of subject directors from the trust provide support to middle leaders on a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The local authority is providing support for governance and currently investigating further support for alternative provision for pupils at risk of exclusion. Although this support has resulted in some improvements, it has not brought about rapid enough improvement in some areas, since the previous inspection.