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20 November 2018

Ms Marie Woolston
North West Kent Alternative Provision Service
Westcourt Primary School
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Gravesend
DA12 4JG

Dear Ms Woolston

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of North West Kent Alternative Provision Service

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and a group of staff. I also met with two members of the management committee and spoke with the chair of the management committee on the telephone. I met with two representatives from the local authority.

Together, you and I visited all lessons and observed pupils moving about the building between lessons. We spoke with pupils during these visits. I met with a group of pupils and we looked at their written work in books. I considered the results from the school's parent survey.

I reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks and met with the designated safeguarding lead. I scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including management committee monitoring visit reports, leaders' analysis of pupils' attendance and progress and pupils' behaviour logs. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were considered.

Context

A deputy headteacher has been seconded from another school to provide senior leadership support and returns to her substantive post in January 2019. A permanent deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2018 and is also now the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). The headteacher is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and a team of three deputy DSLs is established. A large number of staff have left the school. New staff have joined and the previous reliance on agency staff has been eradicated. There have been further changes to the management committee, with new members joining.

The provision now operates on two sites: key stage 3 in Swanley and key stage 4 in Gravesend. The key stage 4 provision has moved into temporary premises, pending the move to a permanent refurbished location in September 2019.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and the management committee are taking swift and decisive action to ensure that the school improves. The local authority is providing helpful support and challenge to leaders as they make the changes that are needed. Staff welcome the renewed positive culture in the school and describe the school as 'evolving' and 'transforming'. Pupils in key stage 4 are pleased about the move to new premises this term and the better facilities that they now enjoy. Leaders are building effective links with local schools. Leaders' well-conceived improvement plans identify appropriate actions to bring about the changes that are required. However, plans do not yet focus sharply enough on evaluating the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' outcomes.

Pupils are now safe. Weaknesses in safeguarding practice that were identified at the previous inspection have been corrected. Recruitment checks for new staff are diligently carried out and records carefully maintained. Leaders provide staff with helpful training and regular updates. As a result, staff are alert to the signs that may indicate that a pupil needs extra help and they know how to report any concerns. Leaders swiftly evaluate reported concerns and rigorously follow these up, making timely and appropriate referrals to outside agencies when required. Allegations against members of staff are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Tighter arrangements are now in place to share information about pupils' well-being across the two sites and with mainstream schools when pupils return. The use of physical restraint is reducing successfully in key stages 3 and 4 because staff have received appropriate training. Records are now carefully kept when physical restraint is used. The school's safeguarding policy has been updated to cover most aspects of recent government legislation. However, the policy does not consider the protection of pupils from criminal exploitation, including issues of 'county lines'. Further work is needed to ensure that the policy is fully compliant in this aspect.

Since the last inspection, leaders have completely overhauled the school's approach

to managing behaviour. A clear behaviour management policy is in place. Leaders have set high expectations for pupils' positive behaviour in and around the school. Pupils conduct themselves well and listen respectfully to each other and adults most of the time. However, sometimes teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough and pupils' low-level disruptive behaviour is not routinely corrected. Leaders have ensured that staff are trained and fully understand the rigour required in recording and reporting behavioural incidents. Raising expectations about behaviour and recording has led to an increase in reported behavioural incidents. Further refinement of these records is required to improve the quality of information provided, so that leaders can analyse behaviour with greater precision and swiftly adjust support when needed. Attendance is also improving for some pupils, although further work is needed to ensure that these improvements are consistently sustained across the school.

Leaders are taking a sensible approach to the development of the curriculum. They are making effective use of teachers' skills and expertise in their curriculum design. Pupils now study a broader range of subjects and courses than previously to help them make a positive transition to further education, apprenticeships or employment. Pupils are increasingly motivated to learn because they can see how their work will help them to achieve longer term goals. Last year, pupils in Year 11 received carefully tailored support to fill gaps in their learning so that they left the school with appropriate skills and qualifications. As a result, most pupils in Year 11 left the school with a secure offer of a job or a place on a college course.

Leaders are skilfully improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staff receive helpful training and support to sharpen their skills. Visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books show many examples of work that is well matched to pupils' needs and that successfully builds on previous learning. Using strong subject knowledge, teachers make effective use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and clarify any misconceptions. For example, in English, pupils were thoughtfully considering unfamiliar vocabulary in a text. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent. Sometimes, pupils spend too much time on activities without a clear purpose and when this happens, pupils lose interest and their progress is too slow.

Leaders have successfully evaluated the skills and training needs of all staff. A comprehensive programme of ongoing professional development is now established. Staff benefit from clear performance management arrangements to help them improve their work. Leaders have reviewed all job descriptions and consequently staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. Experienced staff provide helpful support to new colleagues when they join the school. As a result, staff morale is improving, and staff say that they look forward to going to work.

Leaders are taking positive action to improve the way that pupils' progress is monitored. Greater rigour is being applied and pupils now have learning targets based on their outcomes at the end of key stage 2. The newly appointed SENCo is

assessing all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to accurately establish their learning needs. This information is being used to identify pupils' starting points so that leaders can carefully evaluate the effectiveness of support offered to pupils with SEND. The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium grant has not yet been carried out, although it is scheduled to take place later this term. Leaders do not yet have the information that they need as to whether additional funding is focused precisely enough on improving disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.

The management committee is effectively contributing to the school's improvement. Several new committee members also hold leadership roles in local schools and their expertise has been warmly welcomed. Committee members lead on different areas of responsibility and undertake regular monitoring visits to the school. For example, the committee has carried out several safeguarding monitoring visits, some unannounced, and then made helpful recommendations for further improvement. Committee members are increasingly using a range of first-hand information to provide effective support and challenge to school leaders.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

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

Leaders and the management committee must urgently ensure that the recommended external review of the school's use of the pupil premium grant is undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Prince
Her Majesty's Inspector