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Mr Dominic Crompton
Headteacher
Skilts School
Gorcott Hill
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mr Crompton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Skilts School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 December 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 December 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 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 interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. 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 December 2017

- As a matter of urgency, improve pupils' behaviour and their safety by:
 - minimising the use of physical intervention
 - carefully monitoring the use and appropriateness of physical intervention
 - tracking behaviour incidents with more rigour, analysing the tracking information to discern any patterns and trends and responding accordingly
 - putting in place interventions as necessary to help pupils manage and improve their behaviour
 - providing staff with training so they properly understand and respond appropriately to pupils' challenging behaviour
 - supporting teachers to devise effective strategies for the management of pupils with particularly challenging behaviour.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - safeguarding procedures are clearly understood and adhered to by all staff, especially in relation to making a written record of any concerns
 - governors have an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and contribute fully to the school's strategic direction
 - all pupils have their full entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum which meets their individual needs
 - the curriculum and teaching are carefully adapted for those pupils who are not thriving and progressing with the current offer
 - leaders carefully monitor and evaluate the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils so that it is used well to help them make good progress
 - leadership is more effectively distributed so that middle leaders have a wider impact on pupils' achievement across the school.
- Ensure that teaching is at least consistently good and leads to good outcomes by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - identifying gaps in pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, and addressing these rapidly
 - providing work which is more challenging and makes pupils think harder, especially for the most able pupils
 - developing pupils' reading skills across the curriculum so they are given more frequent opportunities to practise and improve their reading.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 December 2018

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, the associate senior leader, the acting deputy headteacher, the pastoral team and a group of staff. She also met with the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the chief executive officer (CEO) of Forward Education Trust and an external consultant who continues to support the school. She visited classes, usually with senior leaders, to observe learning that was taking place, and observed pupils moving around the school at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The inspector spoke to pupils informally during the inspection and looked at their work in books. She scrutinised a wide range of documents including the school's action plan, policies, external monitoring reports and information about pupils' progress and looked at the school's website. The inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and looked at safeguarding records and the school's checks on staff recruitment. She considered behaviour management, attendance and exclusion information.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the substantive headteacher has returned to the school after a long period of absence. The interim headteacher has been retained at the school as an associate senior leader. One senior leader has left the school after gaining a promotion and there is a vacant post for a building services manager. A temporary full-time sports coach has been appointed. A number of staff continue to be employed on a temporary basis, either through supply agencies or on fixed-term contracts. However, there is more stability in staffing because these staff are appointed on longer term contracts.

The Forward Education Trust has now been identified as the school's academy sponsor, and their CEO continues to provide significant support to the school during the process of academy conversion. The governing body has been dissolved and has been replaced by an IEB. The school continues to operate under severe financial constraints.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The substantive headteacher has been supported well by the trust since his return to the school. The previous interim headteacher is now working as a senior associate leader on a temporary basis. He is working with the headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher to ensure that the pace of improvement of the school is sustained. The leadership capacity of the school remains fragile due to the interim nature of two of these three leadership roles. This is unlikely to be resolved until the school's financial difficulties have been resolved and a full staffing structure is agreed and implemented.

The CEO of the trust has ensured that there is a strategic plan in place to convert the school to an academy. Following an audit of the school building, which has shown that it is not fit for purpose, agreement has been reached with the local authority for a new building. However, a site has not yet been identified, which has created anxiety for some staff.

Leaders have been successful in securing the appropriate levels of funding for pupils who have the most complex needs. As a result, these pupils are much better supported in school and now receive the help to which they are entitled, as stated in their education, health and care plans.

The leadership team continue to work at pace to bring about improvements needed to the school. Staff told the inspector that they appreciate the support they receive from the 'approachable' leadership team, and they can see the improvements that are being made to the school. The pastoral team are now well established and provide effective and consistent support to the pupils and staff. Leaders are now working more strategically to improve the school rather than having to respond to behaviour incidents on a daily basis. Leaders know where improvements have been made and sustained, but also recognise that there is still work to do. Their evaluation of the school's current position is accurate.

The chair of the newly formed IEB has a clear vision for, and commitment to, improving the school. He is working closely with the trust to ensure that newly appointed board members and those that are to be appointed in the future have the requisite skills to further support the drive for improvement. Minutes from IEB board meetings show that members are now holding leaders to account for their actions. However, there is not yet sufficient emphasis on the scrutiny of teaching and learning, or the resulting progress the pupils make, and the outcomes they achieve.

Pupils are safe at school. Since the last monitoring visit, the acting deputy headteacher has taken on the role of DSL. All staff have received recent safeguarding training as well as additional online training relating to the 'Prevent' duty, female genital mutilation, mental health and online safety. The DSL ensures that staff follow the school's correct referral routes, via the 'yellow forms'. She pursues any safeguarding concerns, including those relating to children missing education, with tenacity. Safeguarding induction procedures for supply staff are currently less well planned and rely on a 'drip feed' approach.

Leaders have worked well with the trust to identify opportunities for staff's professional development. Staff have received training in a range of areas, specifically designed to enable them to better support the pupils' needs. Staff have now been trained in understanding autism spectrum disorder and positive approaches to behaviour management. Some staff have received training in writing social stories. Further training has already been arranged for the new year. Leaders are now identifying where there is strong practice within school and plan to use staff's expertise to develop skills in the scaffolding of writing, for example. Staff

spoke positively to the inspector about the training they have recently received. They can see how it helps them better support the pupils on a daily basis.

Leaders and the IEB have now ensured that arrangements to manage teachers' and the headteacher's performance are now in place. The setting of teachers' targets links to the actions identified in the school's development plan and includes a focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have worked with staff to overhaul the curriculum. Staff have welcomed these changes as they can see how they benefit the pupils. Together, leaders and staff have developed a thematic curriculum, based on four separate strands, which include lifelong learning and expressive and creative arts. Teachers are now taking on areas of responsibility linked to the strands. They are working together to plan a termly thematic approach designed to engage the pupils' interests and meet their needs, through themes such as 'superheroes'. These 'middle leader' roles have only recently started. Leaders plan to extend these roles to enable middle leaders to monitor the quality of the curriculum.

Leaders have ensured that all pupils now have the same curriculum entitlement and access to activities such as forest school, food technology and swimming. Leaders have introduced additional activities to support pupils with their emotional and social needs, such as sensory circuits and construction therapy. Through their analysis of pupils' behaviour, the pastoral team and leaders make sure that extra support is well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils told the inspector that lessons are now more interesting and said that they enjoy the range of activities they now take part in.

Leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning is now more systematic and includes visits to lessons and work trawls. Teachers who may need additional support to improve their practice receive it. Some staff have had the opportunity to visit different settings to see good practice. Current systems for the monitoring of teaching and learning are over-reliant on the acting deputy headteacher and are less well understood by other leaders.

Parents and carers are engaging more positively with the school and have opportunities to attend parent workshops in their children's classes. The school's most recent parent survey, carried out in July 2018, shows that most parents who responded feel that their children are safe and happy in school and are well looked after.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Continuing improvements to pupils' behaviour are having a positive impact on behaviour for learning in the classroom. Staff manage pupils' behaviour calmly and consistently, and strong relationships are evident. Pupils are more focused and engaged in their learning, and the inspector saw very few pupils out of class when

they should not have been. The pastoral team is effective in the way they work with pupils in a supportive way and the impact of disruption on other pupils' learning is minimised. Typical comments from pupils included, 'We can get on with our learning and not be disturbed.'

The quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent. Where practice is stronger, work is well matched to pupils' abilities, but this is not yet common practice. The use of tasks to scaffold learning in English, for example, is helping pupils to develop and improve their writing over time. Learning objectives are not always explicit and as a result it is not clear what pupils are expected to learn. Some pupils are still not being challenged well enough in their learning and complete tasks that are too easy for them. Teachers do not use questioning well enough to help pupils reflect on their learning so that they can learn from their misunderstandings and build their resilience.

Staff do not routinely address errors in pupils' work and as a result pupils repeat their mistakes. Staff do not adopt a consistent approach to annotating pupils' work because leaders' expectations for marking and annotation are unclear. Teachers do not routinely follow up incomplete work or the additional tasks they have set for pupils well enough. On occasions, staff continue to reinforce misconceptions or incorrect spellings and punctuation.

The teaching of mathematics is well supported by the use of practical equipment, and pupils showed that they were confident in its use. The amount of progress pupils make in mathematics varies from class to class.

Additional training to ensure a consistent approach to the teaching of reading has now been planned for the spring term. In the interim, leaders have made sure that existing staff skills are used to best effect across the school to support phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and reading development. Pupils are now developing a confidence in reading, supported by daily phonics sessions and the newly introduced guided reading sessions. However, there remains an urgent need for staff training as the current teaching of phonics is not of a consistently high quality.

Pupils' lifelong learning books reflect a range of themes that are engaging pupils in their learning, including keeping safe, learning about religions, inequality and 'having a go'. The quality of pupils' work in this newly developed area does not reflect that seen in pupils' English books. Pupils are completing the same tasks, regardless of their abilities and there are few opportunities for extended writing or additional challenge.

Purposeful learning is taking place in the extended curriculum. In forest school, pupils were able to explain to the inspector how a fire can become stronger when the flames are blown. Pupils were clearly enjoying the activities and showed a good awareness of health and safety. They were well supervised by staff. In the school

café, pupils enjoyed the responsibility of serving snacks and drinks to their classmates and taking payments.

The additional support for pupils who were making little or no progress, introduced around the time of the last visit, is having a positive impact on the progress these pupils are making. In the latter half of this term, support has been disrupted due to staffing issues, and leaders recognise that this is likely to have an effect on the progress these pupils are making. The focus of these interventions is evolving; the intervention teacher is planning to match the interventions directly to the work the pupils are completing in class, either in preparation or as a way of reinforcing what has been learned. This work is planned for the new term.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. The number of incidents of negative behaviour has further reduced and the frequency of positive behaviours has increased. The pastoral team and associate senior leader's daily, meticulous analysis of behaviour ensures that pupils receive the support they need. The team knows the reasons for any fluctuations in behaviour, such as staff absence, and careful planning for additional support for pupils is undertaken and put into place. An additional sensory space, the 'hammock room', has been made available for pupils to use when they become anxious or agitated and is used appropriately. Risk reduction plans which set out expectations of the way behaviours are managed on an individual basis continue to be used well. They are written in conjunction with class staff and parents and reviewed at three-monthly intervals. While plans are discussed with pupils, leaders are planning to develop child-friendly versions of the plans to make them even easier for pupils to understand.

As behaviour has improved, exclusions have further reduced. This term, only two pupils have had repeat exclusions. In addition, the numbers of physical interventions have further reduced. The inspector did not see any use of physical interventions during the inspection. Records show that when interventions are used, they are recorded accurately, and enable both staff and pupils to reflect on incidents and how they may be avoided in future.

Pupils' attendance is improving and persistent absence is also reducing. Currently, there are a small number of pupils who remain on the school's roll, but are not attending school. Leaders ensure that regular safe and well checks are being carried out until these pupils transfer to new schools. When this group's attendance is discounted from overall figures, the school's current attendance is in line with national averages.

The school's 'going for gold' reward system is now embedded in daily classroom practice and is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Staff frequently reinforce expectations of good behaviour in lessons and recognise where pupils are making positive behaviour choices. In the lower school assembly, pupils

demonstrated that they were able to ignore some disruption at the back of the room, and were well praised for their efforts. Staff now have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour and told the inspector that what was previously accepted as a 'green' behaviour is now seen as an 'amber' behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2018, the progress made by all pupils in the school was weak, particularly in writing. Only one third of pupils made expected progress in writing. The school's assessment information showed that, overall, higher ability pupils made better progress than the lower ability pupils. Progress made in English was stronger than progress in mathematics. Leaders understand why progress was poor, and relate it to instability in staffing, changes in the organisation of the school and pupils' levels of anxiety associated with a period of change.

The school's current progress information, while not a complete set, indicates that progress is likely to improve. Leaders' additional analysis of information shows that pupils who have been at the school for the shortest period of time are making better progress than those who have been at school for a longer period of time. They attribute this to the improving picture of the quality of teaching over the last year, but it is too soon to draw these conclusions due to inconsistencies in teaching.

The school's current progress targets for pupils are not challenging enough because they do not enable pupils to accelerate their learning and narrow the gap with national expectations, where appropriate.

Leaders are less clear about pupils' attainment as their assessment information only focuses on the progress that pupils are making. They were unable to produce any evidence to show that gaps in attainment are closing over time. In 2018, no pupils were entered for national tests.

Leaders have not given sufficient attention to analysing the impact of the spending of pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils to ensure that it has been used to good effect. Leaders were, however, able to provide evidence about how additional funding has been used to support children looked after and its positive impact.

External support

The school continues to rely on external support and advice to help improve all aspects of the school's performance. Support from the external behaviour consultant has been successful in improving all aspects of behaviour management. His work has now been redefined and staff are now receiving additional training and support, specific to pupils' needs, including the use of positive touch. Both the Forward Education Trust and the service commissioned by Birmingham local authority ensure a rigorous cycle of monitoring of the school, holding leaders to

account.