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24 December 2018

Mr Andrew Wakefield
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Dear Mr Wakefield

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Edge Academy

Following my visit with Lesley Yates, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 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 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 June 2018.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2018.

- Improve leadership and management by:
  – ensuring, without delay, that all safeguarding procedures are adhered to by all staff consistently

  – implementing an effective approach to assessment which provides accurate, validated judgements

  – developing and implementing an effective system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching

  – implementing fully the planned changes to special educational needs (SEN) provision, ensuring the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are met

  – inducting and supporting new leaders so they have a demonstrable impact, beyond their own classes, on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

  – ensuring that funding for disadvantaged pupils is carefully targeted and accounted for, and enables them to make rapid progress.

- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  – developing effective strategies for behaviour management which are consistently applied by all staff

  – significantly reducing the rate of exclusion

  – staff seeking pupils' views about their current placement, well-being and progress, then using this information to inform pupils' next steps

  – ensuring pupils receive effective careers information, advice and guidance so they can make informed decisions about their future

  – ensuring that the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well planned and embedded across the wider curriculum

  – making learning activities more relevant and engaging so pupils are inspired to learn and remain focused.

- Significantly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make at least good progress by:
  – ensuring all staff have the highest possible expectations of all groups of pupils

  – providing a structured programme of training and support for staff to help them develop their teaching skills

  – ensuring that all staff use assessment information well to determine pupils' starting points and plan effective learning tasks which enable pupils to make good progress over time

  – identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' basic literacy skills through a carefully planned programme

- ensuring teachers set work that provides pupils, particularly the most able, with an appropriate degree of challenge to enable them to achieve their potential.

■ Ensure that all pupils attend school regularly and arrive to school on time.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium is recommended in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 December 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and all other members of the school's leadership team, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo), a small group of staff and the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Inspectors spoke on the telephone to two representatives, commissioned by the local authority, who provide school improvement advice and support. The inspection focused significantly on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance because these are the most urgent areas that the school needs to address.

Context

Two teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. Another teacher has resigned with effect from the end of this term. These posts are currently being covered by supply teachers, although leaders have filled two of these positions to start in the spring term 2019. A new vice principal and a new assistant principal joined the school in September 2018. The school's core leadership team has been extended and now comprises a principal, two vice principals and two assistant principals. All leaders are on permanent contracts. The school is currently recruiting for a lead teacher of science.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and other senior leaders have taken swift action to begin to address many of the failings identified at the last inspection. You are under no illusion about the enormity of the task ahead. However, disappointingly, a lack of management oversight in relation to safeguarding has meant that this crucially important area has not been afforded the full attention it warrants. While there has been some success in addressing weaknesses, not all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and therefore vulnerable pupils are potentially left at risk.

Since the last inspection, you have invested time in a 'root and branch' review of many different aspects of the school's provision. You have commissioned external partners to come in and assess the school's work in relation to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. This has included reviews related to behaviour management, special educational needs, safeguarding, the quality of teaching and learning, and the use of pupil premium funding. These reviews have supported leaders in gaining an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. In most cases, leaders have been quick to respond to the recommendations of each review.

The newly formed leadership team is working collaboratively to bring about positive change. Members are clear about their specific areas of responsibility and what needs to be achieved to provide pupils with an improved educational experience. You give leaders sufficient non-teaching time to carry out their duties and

responsibilities and expect them to be accountable for pupils' outcomes and performance. Most, but not all, leaders maintain a good oversight of their respective areas. They have an optimistic outlook and show determination to address weaknesses. Leaders produce informative 'impact reports' that detail the actions they have taken to bring about improvements. The quality of leaders' evaluation in these reports is generally strong and shows that most new initiatives are beginning to make a positive difference. Leaders carefully reflect on their findings and identify lessons learned and next steps. This is helping to generate a cycle of continual improvement.

The school improvement plan is comprehensive and closely aligned to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. It includes half-termly milestones that are used to measure success. Leaders and trustees regularly review the plan to ensure that everyone keeps on track. A 'position column' is included on the plan to record leaders' evaluation against actions and their intended impact. In most instances, inspection evidence concurs with leaders' evaluations. However, the position statement related to safeguarding does not accurately reflect the shortcomings that still exist.

Leaders have raised the profile of safeguarding significantly over the last term. They have ensured that all staff, including supply staff, have received effective safeguarding training. Consequently, staff know what to do if they have a welfare concern about a pupil and they report their concerns without delay. Staff are knowledgeable about a wide range of safeguarding issues, including forced marriage, fabricated illness and the signs that a pupil may be involved in county lines activity. In mid October, leaders commissioned a full day's safeguarding review, led by experienced safeguarding leaders from another school. The review identified a wide range of safeguarding issues. Leaders have since taken appropriate action to address some, but not all, of the recommendations outlined in the review's findings.

Staff awareness about safeguarding has been heightened and they are now much more vigilant. As a result, the number of concerns logged has significantly increased. However, the quality of recording and the logging of subsequent actions taken by staff is not consistently robust. This is a result of weak management oversight. Missing information and a lack of clarity about how concerns have been addressed have meant that safeguarding leaders have not followed up or escalated cases when the response from Birmingham children's services has been unsatisfactory.

Leaders have worked hard to design and implement an effective system for assessment that provides accurate judgements about pupils' attainment. All pupils now have a precise baseline assessment. This is based on a range of standardised tests in reading and spelling, combined with assessed pieces of work in mathematics and writing. Teachers have used this information, combined with their knowledge of pupils, to set appropriate targets. The assessment leader has revised the school's assessment policy and provided training to staff to make expectations clear. In addition, pupils' work is now moderated across all subjects, to help ensure

the accuracy of teachers' judgements.

Since the last inspection, there has been a concerted effort to share roles and responsibilities more evenly across the leadership team. With the expansion of the team, you have been able to take a more strategic stance on school improvement. You are no longer holding sole responsibility for the majority of leadership tasks. New leaders are well supported by experienced leaders from another alternative provision that has been judged by Ofsted to be good. Governors, complemented by external partners, provide an additional level of effective challenge through the recently formed post-Ofsted improvement board (POIB), which meets monthly. Minutes from POIB meetings demonstrate that members provide a high degree of challenge and clearly hold leaders to account for their work.

Leaders' actions to improve teaching and learning have very much focused on building a culture of learning, although there is still considerable work to do. With some changes in staffing, leaders relaunched and simplified the 'non-negotiables' – those basic expectations about teaching that everyone is expected to adhere to. Where appropriate, teachers have received subject-specific support and an opportunity to observe effective teaching in other schools. This is helping to build teachers' confidence and develop stronger subject knowledge.

Leaders make frequent checks on the quality of teaching, teachers' planning and the work in pupils' books. They also seek feedback from pupils about their learning experiences. Leaders collate this information and give prompt, constructive feedback to staff on areas for improvement. However, sometimes the written feedback is focused too much on what teachers do rather than the effect of their teaching on pupils' learning. Nevertheless, most staff respond well to leaders' guidance and make changes to their practice as a result. This is contributing to an improving picture of teaching.

Leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is developing. Teachers have a better understanding of the needs of these pupils because individual 'pupil information profiles' have been created for every pupil. These outline information about pupils' likes and dislikes, their specific needs and suggested teaching strategies. However, teaching strategies are often not well matched to pupils' identified special educational needs. This is also the case in relation to pupils who have an education, health and care plan. Leaders have provided staff with some general SEND awareness training, such as supporting pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This is enabling staff to have a better understanding about how pupils relate to school and approach their learning tasks.

You commissioned an initial informal review of pupil premium that focused mainly on establishing a plan of action, as there was very little in place previously. Leaders have now put in place an appropriate strategy for the expenditure of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils' personal and academic development. Leaders have identified some of the potential barriers to future attainment of disadvantaged pupils and have plans to offer appropriate interventions to support

learning. For example, leaders have appointed two teaching assistants to deliver a specialist reading programme to support disadvantaged pupils who have difficulty reading. It is too early to determine the effectiveness of this work at present.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was not evaluated in any depth during this inspection. However, evidence about the quality of teaching over time and the brief observations of teaching during the inspection indicate that its quality varies widely. Leaders have started to identify the gaps in pupils' basic literacy skills by assessing pupils' reading and spelling ability using standardised tests. They have put plans in place to begin a reading intervention programme for those pupils who experience the greatest difficulty with reading. This is due to start in the spring term.

Leaders have established pupils' starting points using the new assessment system, although do not yet have any progress information available. Evidence from pupils' work shows that more teachers are providing helpful guidance to pupils on how to improve their work and make better progress. However, this is not yet a common feature across the school. Teachers' expectations are not consistently high, and this is reflected in the low-level tasks that pupils are sometimes asked to undertake. Conversely, in some subjects, such as English, work is carefully matched to pupils' needs, and engaging, thoughtful teaching helps to keep pupils focused and learning.

Some teachers are not doing enough to capture pupils' attention and help them make sense of their learning, but other staff are working hard to re-engage pupils with their learning. Pupils speak positively about English, catering and art, and say that this is where the best learning happens.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the start of the new academic year, leaders have placed significant emphasis on overhauling the school's approach to behaviour management. Staff have undertaken training, and there is now a greater focus on praise rather than sanctions. Pupils say that they enjoy receiving 'praise postcards'. However, despite the changes, inconsistency in teachers' management of behaviour remains. This is, in part, due to the turbulence in staffing, with temporary teachers joining the school who do not have the same depth of knowledge about the agreed approach to behaviour management. Furthermore, not all staff have been trained in positive handling strategies, and leaders are unsure whether all physical interventions are consistently recorded.

Leaders have introduced free breakfast for pupils, which has helped to encourage better punctuality. You have reduced the amount of truanting from school by stopping the practice of pupils being permitted to leave the building at lunchtime. However, internal truanting – when pupils leave a lesson without permission or do not return after going to the toilet – remains a significant problem and a

safeguarding concern. Where teaching is most effective, pupils are engaged well in their learning and are much less likely to truant from class. In these lessons, pupils usually settle quickly to tasks and produce good-quality work.

Leaders have worked hard to successfully reduce the rate of exclusion. While it remains high, there has been a marked reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions. In addition, the number of repeat exclusions is reducing, and there have been no exclusions of children looked after. There have also been no permanent exclusions. The number of pupils on part-time timetables has reduced dramatically since the last inspection – almost all pupils now attend school full time. Similarly, the proportion of pupils attending external alternative provision has dramatically reduced.

The school monitors attendance more rigorously than previously, and the attendance officer intervenes as necessary. The strategy of making home visits for non-attenders is working. Consequently, there has been a significant improvement in pupils' attendance, although the overall attendance figure remains low compared with the national average. The rate of persistent absence, while it has reduced significantly, remains high. Pupils' punctuality is also problematic, with too many pupils arriving much later than the school's start time. Leaders are trying to address this by issuing a 30-minute detention on the same day. It is too early to tell whether this is making a difference.

Appropriate plans are under way to improve pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders have created a schedule for tutor time to ensure that pupils have opportunities to explore acts of kindness and how to show respect. Leaders have put effective structures in place to gather pupils' views about their learning experiences. Staff are starting to analyse the feedback from pupils and identify ways to respond to their suggestions. In November, a new student council was formed. Pupils say that they feel their views are now being considered more seriously by leaders.

You have taken steps to improve the quality of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), but plans have not been implemented quickly enough by those staff responsible for CEIAG. Too many Year 10 and Year 11 pupils are still unsure about their futures, their next steps and the qualifications they need to achieve their aims. A few pupils are very misguided and believe that they do not need any qualifications or further training in order to follow a particular career path or vocation. A senior leader has recently taken responsibility for overseeing CEIAG in order to support staff to get initiatives under way more promptly.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' academic outcomes were not evaluated during this inspection. However, it is clear from the number of pupils' books that have been annotated with the word 'absent' that until pupils attend all their lessons and school regularly, they are highly unlikely to make good progress and achieve good outcomes.
External support

The partner commissioned by the local authority to offer school improvement services is providing effective support for the school's leadership team and governors. A representative attends all POIB meetings and challenges appropriately. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The leadership team finds the support from experienced leaders from REACH Alternative Provision and Saint Augustine's Teaching School invaluable. It is helping members to widen their leadership skills and validate their judgements about the progress being made in relation to the school's action plan. The independent reviews of different aspects of the school's work have been particularly helpful.