

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



29 January 2019

Mr S Evans  
Interim headteacher  
New Leaf Centre  
Pelsall Lane  
Rushall  
Walsall  
West Midlands  
WS4 1NG

Dear Mr Evans

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of New Leaf Centre**

Following my visit with Peter Humphries, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Sarah Ashley, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 16–17 January 2019, 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 April 2018. 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 may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.**

- Take urgent steps to ensure that all pupils are taught in a safe environment by:
  - ensuring that all buildings are fit for purpose, adequately cleaned and maintained
  - updating risk assessments and safeguarding training records
  - identifying and supporting the behavioural needs of each pupil
  - arranging further training for staff on managing pupil behaviour.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - resolving the inadequate governance arrangements
  - securing stability in senior leadership
  - securing permanent staffing arrangements
  - revising the curriculum at each key stage so that it meets the needs of pupils
  - making sure that the provision for disadvantaged pupils meets their needs
  - securing effective support from the local authority.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - assessing the pupils' level of attainment when they start school and matching programmes of study to the needs of each pupil
  - supplying teachers and pupils with sufficient resources
  - organising training for staff who work outside of their specialism
  - meeting the identified needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Tackle poor attendance and attitudes of pupils by:
  - monitoring and addressing the incidence and nature of pupils' absence more carefully
  - devising a strategy to improve pupils' attendance, which includes rewards as well as sanctions
  - making sure that pupils and staff understand what is acceptable behaviour
  - ensuring that staff act quickly, resolutely and consistently when pupils' behaviour is unacceptable
  - strengthening the system for rewarding good behaviour.
- Check the arrangements for alternative provision more carefully so the needs of pupils are met by:
  - reviewing the quality of each placement and its relevance for each pupil, including removing pupils from any provision that may be operating illegally
  - conducting regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning in these provisions
  - evaluating the impact of alternative provision in improving pupils' attendance and progress

- supporting key stage 4 pupils in achieving recognised GCSE qualifications.

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

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

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 January 2019 to 17 January 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, the alternative provision manager, other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the chair and a member of the management committee, and a representative from the local authority (LA). On the first day of the inspection, inspectors visited six of the alternative providers which pupils in key stage 4 attend. They spent the second day at the main New Leaf site. At all sites, inspectors observed learning, talked to pupils, staff and leaders and looked at pupils' work.

### **Context**

The number of pupils on roll has grown from 125 in September to 144. Of these, 85 pupils are in key stage 4 and spend all their time at alternative providers. Most attend two or three different providers. The biggest growth in numbers has been in key stage 3. There were previously 23 pupils and there are now 32.

Several permanent staffing appointments have been made since the previous monitoring inspection. These include a deputy headteacher who joined the pupil referral unit (PRU) in January, and a designated safeguarding lead who joined last term. More of the teachers at the New Leaf site and all the support staff are now on permanent or long-term contracts. Staffing for key stage 4 has also increased, with five key workers now in place.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Since the previous inspection, the interim headteacher has continued to take effective action to implement the large number of improvements needed at New Leaf. In this, he has been well supported by the alternative provision manager and by other leaders and staff. The appointment of a deputy headteacher, the creation of the attendance and safeguarding team, and the appointment of some permanent staff are important moves forward in creating more stability and capacity. The expanded leadership team has allowed the interim headteacher to begin to do more strategic work while other leaders take over some of the day-to-day management. Staff continue to work as a team to try to meet the pupils' often complex social, emotional, mental health and learning needs. The positive approach to behaviour management that the interim headteacher had introduced by the time of the previous inspection remains. Staff are supportive of pupils and continue to develop strategies to meet their individual needs.

The provision for the key stage 4 pupils has continued to improve, although leaders and the LA know that it still has a long way to go until it is good enough. The alternative provision manager has developed a comprehensive system which allows her to know where pupils are, what curriculum they are following, and whether they are attending. All the alternative providers have had safeguarding training run by New Leaf. The LA has started to put in place an audit and monitoring programme for each provider, focusing on safeguarding, health and safety, and teaching and learning. These audits are comprehensive and the providers that have been audited so far report that the process is rigorous. Follow-up visits are planned to providers where weaknesses are discovered. Inspectors' visits to providers showed that there were some very good examples of providers having success with individuals and groups of pupils. Some pupils had improved their attendance enormously and made significant progress with their confidence and their academic learning. Some of the providers have skilled staff, with real knowledge of their subjects, for example in outdoor education and construction. Because there are now more key workers in post as part of the key stage 4 team, pupils are being visited more frequently at their provision than has been the case in the past.

The biggest barrier to success for large numbers of key stage 4 pupils is their attendance at the provision to which they are allocated. For many, it is exceptionally low. Pupils are sometimes expected to travel a long way to their provision. This appears to be a factor in their low attendance. The key stage 4 lead has started to analyse the information she has about the distance pupils travel and put this alongside their attendance to start to draw some conclusions. The initial risk assessment process when a pupil is placed at a provider is in place but needs further refinement. The curriculum at some of the providers is not individualised enough – in some cases the pupil fits the provider rather than the curriculum being designed to meet the pupil's needs. In addition, key stage 4 pupils do not all have personal, social and health education (PSHE) included as part of their curriculum. The alternative provision manager has begun to look at the provision and content of PSHE, mapping the provision for each pupil, in order to start to tackle this issue. The same applies to the provision of careers information, advice and guidance. Whether pupils receive any structured guidance depends on which provision they attend.

Importantly, the interim headteacher has brought the responsibility for leading the improvement of attendance – which previously lay with the LA – in-house. The leadership of attendance and safeguarding now lies with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), which is sensible. The DSL has two family support workers in her team. There are suitable processes in place for following up on non-attendance each day. Leaders have put in place a new procedure for working with families. This involves more supportive conversations with parents and carers than has been the case in the past, to see what support is needed to get their children to school. The DSL has good information about each pupils' attendance and whether this is, or is not, improving.

Despite these sensible and well-managed processes, attendance issues across all key stages are proving really difficult to tackle. Attendance for the autumn term was 54%. Many pupils previously had a negative experience of school and have records of low attendance, but not enough are improving their attendance once at New Leaf. Only the youngest pupils are brought to school on LA transport by taxis or minibuses. From Year 4 onwards, the LA expects pupils to travel independently by bus. Given the exceptionally low levels of attendance, and the distances pupils have to travel, the interim headteacher is considering putting in place more transport for pupils as far as he can. There is some lack of clarity about the actual attendance of some key stage 4 pupils who are sometimes late to their placements.

The new safeguarding policy, in place since October last year, includes a specific section about the use of alternative providers. This highlights some of the potential risks involved in using off-site alternative provision, and the steps that New Leaf aims to take to mitigate these risks. The policy pays appropriate attention to the DfE's 2017 guidance on sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. Staff have had some additional training about safeguarding and the DSL has streamlined processes for reporting issues.

Since the previous inspection, the SENCo has taken a range of positive actions. The SEN register is now complete and accurate. The SENCo has undertaken an audit of key stage 4 alternative provision. From this, she has identified the providers' strengths and weaknesses in providing for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and the key actions that they need to take. The SENCo is challenging mainstream schools where poor SEND information is received, and this is beginning to have an impact. Good inroads have been made into clearing the backlog of education, health and care plan assessments. The school is still awaiting, however, the finalisation of some of these plans from the summer. Staff have better-quality information about the pupils they are teaching and have received some training about SEND. The use of this information to inform teaching is improving, though it is not yet consistent.

The PRU is now almost full with pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools. The local authority is unable to find a suitable building for New Leaf to move into in the foreseeable future. Given this situation, swift action is needed to improve the current building. The building's structure makes it noisy, and this is not helped by the double doors along the corridor, which slam and get easily damaged. This disrupts learning and does not help to create a calm atmosphere. Carpets and paintwork are not in a good state of repair. Parts of the outdoor space are overgrown with brambles. Leaders and teachers have tried to create some pleasant spaces at the New Leaf site, with some success. However, more significant changes are urgently needed to make the building and surroundings into an appropriately high-quality learning environment which meets the needs of the pupils.

The interim headteacher is working with local schools to try to gain places for New Leaf pupils, particularly the younger ones. This has led to some success, though progress on this issue has begun to slow. While some schools are willing to take pupils, others are more reluctant. This further inhibits New Leaf's capacity to take new pupils.

The management committee is well led. More members have joined since the previous monitoring inspection, and between them they have a wide range of useful skills and knowledge. The committee is well-focused on the necessary improvements. They are providing important challenge to the LA as well as support and challenge to leaders.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

A scrutiny of some Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils' work showed that pupils who attend regularly are studying a reasonably broad curriculum and responding increasingly well to the demands placed upon them by staff. Much of the work showed good effort from pupils and at least some progress over time.

In the primary lessons visited during the inspection, there was a pleasant working atmosphere. Pupils were working cooperatively together and with staff. They coped well with the challenges set for them. Work was at the right level for their needs and made them think. Teachers paid good attention to pupils' individual needs.

Older pupils' responses were more variable. Some were well-focused on their learning and avoided distractions from others. Other pupils spent time in and out of lessons. Staff managed this well, often re-engaging pupils quite quickly. The work pupils were given to do was appropriate to pupils' ages and levels of understanding. For example, key stage 3 pupils were learning about climate change in their science lesson. Some pupils found it difficult to rise to the suitable challenges being set for them by teachers but were being supported by staff to do so.

Some of the key stage 4 providers have a limited understanding of pupils' special educational needs. This, alongside persistent absence for some, affects pupils' ability to progress. The SENCo is working systematically with providers to help to improve their understanding.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The interim headteacher's calm approach to managing behaviour, reported on at the time of the previous inspection, has continued. Staff are equally calm and pleasant, yet persistent, when pupils are not doing as they should be. This helps to create a positive atmosphere at New Leaf much of the time. Many pupils have challenging behaviours which at times lead to incidents. Staff have suitable strategies to manage these times.



As at the time of the previous inspection, routines are clear, and pupils largely respond well. Pupils went quickly to their classrooms at the start of the day and after break. Leaders are aiming to refine the start of the day further, to give pupils more time with their tutors. The planned reward scheme has not yet been implemented and the deputy headteacher is rightly keen to put this in place quickly.

A small number of pupils have been excluded more than once from the New Leaf site or their alternative provision since the start of the academic year. The interim headteacher has put in place several strategies to address the issues that led to the exclusion. However, partly because of cramped space at the PRU site, the opportunities for interventions and for alternatives to exclusion are limited.

As already noted, attendance is exceptionally low. In addition, some pupils are on part-time timetables, though this number has been systematically reduced.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Pupils' progress is closely linked to their attendance at the New Leaf site or their alternative provision and to the extent to which they stay in lessons once they are there. Inspectors saw some positive evidence of pupils who attend reasonably well making progress across the curriculum.

### **External support**

The school improvement partner knows the PRU well and continues to provide support and challenge leaders. The LA has increased the level of educational psychology support for the PRU and a suitably senior psychologist is linked to the PRU. The LA needs to give urgent attention to the issues surrounding pupils' exceptionally low attendance, particularly with regard to how they travel to and from New Leaf or their alternative provision placement, and the extent to which transport arrangements are a barrier to them attending.