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Mr Paul Hougham
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Dear Mr Hougham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Steiner Academy Exeter

Following my visit with Julie Carrington, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 14–15 May 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 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 October 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, but requires revision.

Having considered the evidence, I recommend that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, governors and leaders must secure the safety and well-being of pupils, by:
 - completing the investigation into the serious incident from July, identifying systemic weaknesses and drawing up a detailed action plan to address these
 - reviewing all the information that the school holds on vulnerable pupils in order to identify and provide immediate child protection support for those who need it
 - reviewing all staff personnel records and completing suitability checks, as required
 - ensuring that staff in the Kindergarten receive immediate support in behaviour management and clear direction on the use of physical interventions.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - completing the planned strategic leadership review so that roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear
 - ensuring that all improvement plans include specific targets against which the impact of actions can be judged
 - establishing a programme of whole-school monitoring and review for safeguarding, special educational needs (SEN), teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance
 - ensuring that all leaders have the training, time and professional support to perform their roles effectively and in line with legal requirements
 - reviewing the curriculum, especially in the lower school, to ensure that it builds academic progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that the school complies with the SEN and disability code of practice by working with outside agencies to:
 - review the SEN policy to ensure that it complies with statutory expectations and reflects best practice
 - urgently evaluate the current provision for all pupils on education, health and care (EHC) plans, and take immediate action to ensure that their needs are met
 - review the provision for all pupils on the school's SEN register to identify whether their needs have been accurately identified, and ensure that their needs are met effectively

- ensure that the early identification of pupils with SEN improves
- work in partnership with parents and families, so that they are fully involved in supporting their child's education.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and, by doing this, raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that all teachers from Class 1 upwards systematically plan learning that enables pupils to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that learning activities in the early years (Kindergarten) are purposeful and matched against agreed learning and development goals
 - holding all teachers to account for the quality of their work and the impact it has on pupils' progress
 - improving teachers' assessment of pupils' progress and ensuring that this informs their teaching
 - establishing an effective whole-school behaviour policy with agreed rewards and sanctions and ensuring that this is applied consistently by all staff.
- Improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and for those with SEN and/or disabilities (SEND), so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how the use of this funding may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 14–15 May 2019

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors conducted observations of pupils' learning and reviewed their work. Inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders in these activities. Inspectors reviewed documents and met with the interim principal, senior and middle leaders, staff and pupils. Correspondence from parents and carers was also considered.

The lead inspector held discussions with the chair of the academy management committee (AMC), the members of which are the trustees. He also met with the chief executive officer of a multi-academy trust that is providing leadership support to the school.

In this first monitoring inspection, inspectors focused on the school's work to improve safeguarding arrangements, pupils' attendance and the quality of provision for pupils with SEND and for the youngest children in the Kindergarten and lower school.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2018, the principal, other senior leaders and many staff have left the school. The interim vice-principal has been appointed as the interim principal. The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen.

The board of trustees was dissolved shortly after the inspection. The regional schools commissioner established the AMC and appointed two education professionals to this. Subsequently, two additional committee members have been appointed, as well as an associate member who provides specific financial acumen to the group. The AMC serves as the board of trustees. The members of the trust remain, and the chair of the AMC is now a member of the trust.

The school is in receipt of additional funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to secure additional leadership capacity and services needed to tackle the many shortcomings that were identified in October. The school has procured this support from the Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust and Babcock LDP, a joint venture between Babcock International and Devon County Council.

The future of the school remains uncertain. The DfE is currently considering the options for the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The uncertainty of the school's future has hindered, and continues to hinder, the impact of leaders' work. Few members of the leadership team are substantive members of staff. Leaders with the key responsibilities for improving the quality of leadership, teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' well-being and safety, and pupils' outcomes are in temporary positions. Leaders' inability to make critical decisions, such as the appointment of staff to key roles, has resulted in progress in many areas of the school's work being too slow. However, in some of the areas where leaders have greater control, they have taken positive action. This is most clearly seen in the calmness of the environment.

The inspection in October 2018 found the arrangements to keep pupils safe to be ineffective. Leaders have made some progress in this area. Internal and external investigations into the incident in July 2018, when two pupils absconded, have been completed and the findings taken into account. The perimeter of the site is now fully secure and the arrangements for controlling access to the site, and the Kindergarten, have been improved. However, the procedures to ensure that pupils are where they should be and accurate registers are maintained are still not robust.

Leaders and trustees have reviewed the checks on staff and volunteers to ensure they are suitable people to work with children. Consequently, some of the checks that were missing in October have now been carried out. However, this is not the case for all staff or volunteers. Where checks have been undertaken, staff and trustees have not been suitably vigilant in their scrutiny of these and so the records lack integrity.

Of greatest concern is the lack of attention leaders give to the significant minority of pupils who do not attend school regularly. The school's systems to check on these pupils' whereabouts and their safety are deficient. For a small number of pupils who receive some or all of their education from an alternative provider, leaders do not make sure they receive all the information they require in a timely fashion. Neither do they ensure that these pupils receive the education to which they are entitled. With new leaders in place, there is now greater capacity to manage this, but leaders do not have the knowledge or understanding they need in respect of their statutory duties.

Safeguarding record keeping, although improved, is still poor. Records are often incomplete or lack precision. Where there are follow-up actions, the outcome of these is not routinely recorded. Moreover, the systems in place to monitor attendance, pupils educated elsewhere and child protection procedures are disconnected and do not support each other. Leaders have plans in place to remedy this urgently.

Staff comment positively about the safeguarding training they receive. There is evidence of staff taking this on board in their daily practice.

The use of physical intervention has reduced sharply in recent months. This is due, in part, to staff having a better understanding of pupils' needs, particularly the children in the Kindergarten. Leaders and staff do not analyse incidents of physical intervention in order to identify patterns or trends. This limits their ability to create an environment where the need to physically intervene with pupils becomes exceptional.

The interim principal, supported by trustees, has developed a clear organisational structure for the staffing of the school. He has recruited to these positions through the internal promotion of staff, the secondment of staff from other schools or using agency staff due to the lack of certainty about the school's future. These colleagues have brought much-needed capacity to the leadership and management of the school. Some, however, have not had the training or experience they need to make the necessary improvements quickly enough.

The pupil premium review that was required has been carried out. However, the recommendations have not yet been translated into practice.

The review of governance has not taken place as the governing body at the time of the previous inspection stood down. The AMC members show a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Leaders have completed much work already to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are identified accurately. The assessments and re-assessments of pupils are nearing completion, and these are resulting in more accurate identification of pupils' needs. From the results of this process, individual education plans are being drafted. Over a third of the school's roll are pupils with SEND. Of these, over a quarter have an EHC plan. This is well above that typically seen. However, staff are using expert advice to ensure that the information provided to teaching staff is accurate and helpful. Leaders have a strong understanding of what still needs to be done. They are working closely with staff, external agencies and the local authority to ensure that this extensive piece of work is completed. Nonetheless, leaders are acutely aware that their work has not yet been effective in ensuring that teaching is meeting these pupils' needs.

Leaders' strategies to ensure that pupils read and write well in the lower and middle school are not yet effective. Some staff delivering this strategy are poorly trained and have poor subject knowledge. Leaders have revised the lower school's curriculum in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the implementation of this plan has been too slow. As a result, many pupils are still underachieving.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders are not improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly enough. They have been successful in putting some policies and structures in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. However, leaders' actions are not

yet having the required impact on improving teaching and pupils' outcomes successfully. This is because leaders' guidance is not precisely focused or followed up with enough rigour. Consequently, the variance in the quality of teaching and learning remains stark, and inadequate teaching persists.

Teachers do not routinely take into account what pupils know, understand and can do when they are planning activities. Teachers' explanations of activities are often unclear. This means pupils find it difficult to attempt the work that has been planned. As a result, pupils' learning falters. Teachers' expectations remain too low.

Learning support assistants are not well deployed. Too often, teachers give full responsibility for the teaching of pupils who are farthest behind to learning support assistants. Often, these colleagues do not have the subject knowledge, skills or resources to be able to support pupils effectively.

Some staff who are new to the school bring particular strengths. They show an understanding of pupils' needs and plan activities that ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of one aspect before they move on to a more challenging, related aspect.

Leaders have not checked closely enough to see whether the intended curriculum is being implemented successfully. There is not a close enough connection between the training that staff are provided with and the feedback they receive to bring about the improvements in their teaching. Where pupils have particular gaps in their knowledge, teaching staff do not demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to diminish these.

Pupils find the recently implemented grammar sessions useful. This is helping pupils to identify language construction. However, many pupils are not yet able to translate this into their own writing.

In the Kindergarten, teaching is beginning to improve. The outside learning area is better supervised. However, there are inconsistencies between rooms in the Kindergarten.

Adults do not use assessment of what pupils can do, know and understand precisely enough. As a result, pupils are not making the progress they should. Leaders have not ensured that their higher expectations are communicated to staff clearly and are implemented successfully. Consequently, some actions from previous external monitoring visits are yet to be addressed. This means that pupils of statutory school age are not yet receiving a demanding enough curriculum. In particular, these pupils do not receive the support they need to develop their speaking skills well.

The trustees, interim principal and senior leaders are wholly aware that they have not given teaching, learning and assessment the attention that is needed. They are revising the school improvement plan and drafting action plans to ensure that these

now takes the prominence they require.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour around the school site and in class is now more settled. Pupils cooperate with each other and follow instructions from staff. In classes, most pupils engage in the activities that teachers have planned, although some pupils do not. Sometimes instructions from the teacher are not clear enough and at other times, pupils complete other tasks that do not link to the purpose of the lesson. Teaching staff do not routinely pick up on this and so it continues.

Pupils' attendance at school is poor. Until very recently, it had declined month on month since the start of the academic year. Attendance for pupils of compulsory school age is currently lower than it was last year. This represents a four-year decline in pupils' attendance.

Persistent absence is very slightly lower than it was in 2017/18. Even so, more than one in four pupils do not attend school on a regular basis. This is almost twice the national average.

Particular groups of pupils do not attend well. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND attend less frequently than their classmates. The attendance of both groups in the current academic year is lower than in the previous year.

Leaders recognise the continual decline in attendance. Until January 2019, there were no effective processes or procedures in place. Since January, a member of staff has been deployed solely to monitor and manage attendance. An interim vice-principal oversees this work. They have developed a staged approach to managing pupil absence. Staff have benefited from training about their responsibilities and the importance of regular attendance by pupils. They speak to pupils about their absences and encourage good attendance. Where there is no improvement, phase leaders intervene. Recently, the school has developed a working relationship with an education welfare officer with a view to taking more formal action against parents.

The SEND leader and one of the interim vice-principals have put new systems in place to support the small minority of pupils who remain on the school's roll but have not been attending for some time. Reintegration plans are being used effectively to plan strategies to improve pupils' attendance and attitudes towards school. For a few, real success can be seen. For others, it is too early to see any discernible impact.

A new behaviour and rewards policy was introduced this term. Recognising regular and improving attendance has been included in this.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils are not catching up quickly enough. Work is not planned well to ensure that pupils build their knowledge and understanding over time. This is common across English, mathematics and science.

In the lower school, there are signs of improvement in pupils' writing ability. However, work remains too inconsistent across classes. For example, pupils write with lower-case letters and use joined-up handwriting on one day and then revert to writing in capital letters on another. This inconsistency was not picked up by school leaders prior to the inspection. As a result, teachers' low expectations of pupils remain, and this limits the progress pupils make in some classes.

In classes 3, 4 and 5, standardised assessments are used to track the progress pupils are making in reading. This is enabling leaders to have an overview of pupils' catch-up. Leaders do not have a clear overview of the progress that pupils are making in classes 1 and 2. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils receive phonics teaching from a younger age. However, pupils' reading books are not consistently well matched to the phonics they are being taught.

Pupils with SEND, particularly those with medical needs, continue to make little progress.

External support

Leaders have secured external support from several sources. The Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust is providing the school with two vice-principals to bolster the leadership capacity. Additionally, the chief executive officer provides support for the interim principal.

Babcock LDP is providing an early years consultant on a part-time basis, and other staff to work with leaders on specific aspects of the school's work such as safeguarding, early years, attendance and special educational needs.

An early years adviser from the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship is working with the school to improve the quality of the provision in the Kindergarten.