

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 July 2019

Mr S Evans
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, to your school on 19 June 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 third 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 appoint one newly qualified teacher for key stage 1 and 2 before the next monitoring inspection, in consultation with HMI.

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 third monitoring inspection on 19 June 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, alternative provision manager, who is employed directly by the local authority (LA), special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), a group of staff and a representative from the LA. Phone calls were held with the chair of the management committee, another representative from the LA and two headteachers of schools that New Leaf pupils attend. Inspectors visited lessons, spoke to pupils informally and looked at pupils' work.

This inspection was based at the New Leaf site. Key stage 4 providers were not visited on this occasion. During the inspection, key stage 2 pupils were out of school on an outdoor activity day. Key stages 1 and 3 were on site.

Context

The interim headteacher was appointed to the substantive headship shortly before Easter. Staffing for key stages 1, 2 and 3 has become more stable. Three of the teachers at the New Leaf site now have a permanent contract, although there will be some staffing changes for the autumn term. All the teaching assistants based at the New Leaf site have permanent contracts. Five new teaching assistants have been employed on a temporary basis to support pupils' transition into mainstream or onto the New Leaf site. The key workers for key stage 4 pupils remain on temporary contracts pending the finalisation of a local authority staffing restructure. There are currently 154 pupils on roll, of whom 98 are in key stage 4.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The pupil referral unit (PRU) is becoming overwhelmed by the continued influx of admissions due to permanent exclusions from mainstream schools in the LA. Forty pupils have been admitted on this basis since January. This is draining the PRU's resources and stretching senior leaders very thinly. Nonetheless, the headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteacher and the staff team, has continued to make improvements in the provision at the PRU. During the inspection, staff spoke of improved communication and good support from senior leaders. Because they are now more involved in decision-making, they feel more able to influence change. This positive teamwork has led to some improvements in behaviour, teaching and the school environment. The focus on safeguarding pupils has been further strengthened. Staff have received relevant training and safeguarding is a constant topic of discussion in staff briefings.

Leaders and staff have made some improvements to the New Leaf building. A deep clean took place over the Easter break. The corridors have been painted and brightened up. The double doors in the corridors, which previously caused a great

deal of noise, have been removed. Outside, an overgrown area has been cleared to make a pleasant space in which pupils can play and learn. During the inspection, Year 2 pupils were looking for animals and insects in this area and thoroughly enjoying their learning. There remain severe limitations in the space available, particularly for working with pupils who need more intensive attention because of their behavioural or social and emotional difficulties. Moreover, the small space means that there is no capacity to teach key stage 4 pupils on site, which in turn limits the curriculum that is offered for them, as they are all taught at alternative provision.

Further good work has taken place to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at key stages 1–3. The SENCo has continued to assess pupils' needs, both for new admissions and those who have been on roll for a while. As a result of this assessment process, nine pupils have been given an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and 22 more EHCP applications are being processed by the LA. Some work has been done to identify the needs of pupils at key stage 4. However, there is a lack of clarity about the responsibilities and processes for SEND provision at key stage 4. In particular, there remains uncertainty about the ability of providers to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

The headteacher is forming positive relationships with local headteachers and is gaining their respect for the work he is doing. Sensibly, where possible, he is placing new admissions, or other pupils who are ready to move on, into a mainstream school with support. These pupils remain on the roll of the PRU for as long as necessary, giving both them and the receiving schools a 'safety net' should the placement break down. So far, this strategy is proving successful. To continue and extend it, more staffing will be needed, something that the LA understands.

Leaders have focused strongly on improving the provision at key stage 4. The headteacher has now visited every alternative provider to talk to them about the importance of focusing on pupils' outcomes and to try to make sure that the providers are able to deliver courses at the appropriate level. Two people were commissioned to carry out teaching and learning visits to the providers in first half of the spring term. All the providers were visited, and all were offered a follow-up 'support visit'. These teaching and learning visits looked at a wide range of aspects of the provision but did not focus closely enough on the content of the curriculum and the outcomes, including qualifications, for pupils. The visits raised an issue about the quality and detail of the pre-placement information provided by the PRU. This has been addressed and providers are now happier with the information given. Safeguarding and health and safety audits have also been completed for all providers. Leaders think that this quality assurance process is already leading to more informed and suitable placements.

The headteacher and the alternative provision manager are scrutinising closely the curriculum offered by the providers that are currently used and considering the next

steps to take from September. Their aim is to commission more providers that offer Level 2 qualifications, including GCSEs. Leaders also want to send some New Leaf staff to teach English and mathematics GCSEs to pupils at their placements, though the capacity to do this with the current staffing structure is very limited.

The management committee remains well focused on the most important actions needed for the PRU to improve rapidly. The chair and members ask good questions both of leaders and of the LA, providing an appropriate level of challenge as well as support. Last term, they provided strong challenge about the slow progress in relocating the PRU to another site. The LA has since carried out a wider exercise than before to find out which sites may be suitable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There are indications that behaviour, and the management of behaviour, are improving at the New Leaf site. The use of physical intervention has reduced. The use of fixed-term exclusions has also reduced, though these remain higher than leaders and staff want them to be. Staff have received relevant training, for example on attachment, to help them to understand pupils' needs. At times, pupils who are out of lessons disturb others' learning and this is not addressed quickly enough. Leaders have rightly identified the need to redefine, with staff, the PRU's expectations of pupils' behaviour and to ensure that these are clearly communicated to pupils and to parents and carers.

Overall attendance at the PRU has not improved since the previous inspection. It remains very low, at just below 54%. This is marginally better than attendance at this time of year over the last two years. The details that underlie this figure are quite complex. Some of the pupils with good attendance have moved to mainstream schools. Some of the other PRU pupils have greatly improved their attendance. However, a large number of new pupils have a history of low attendance. In addition, some parents of the newly admitted pupils are refusing to send them to school at all. Leaders have had many supportive and challenging conversations with these parents, but often to no avail. Currently, 35 pupils are attending between 0% and 20% of the time. The time and energy that leaders are having to put into trying to get these pupils into school is having a severely detrimental effect on their ability to improve the attendance of other pupils. Leaders know that they are not doing enough to improve the attendance of those who do attend but not regularly enough and this is frustrating for them. They have received insufficient help from the LA to improve pupils' attendance.

The attendance of key stage 4 pupils is currently 49%. Some Year 11s have stopped attending their placements even though they should be there, and unauthorised absence has gone up. A few pupils have been told not to attend their placements recently as they have finished their qualifications, which is not acceptable. Thirty-one key stage 4 pupils are on reduced timetables. Some of these are building up time in their provision, having recently been excluded from school.

Among the Year 10 pupils, there has been some significant increases in attendance this term, which leaders are determined to maintain into the next academic year.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The small amount of teaching observed at the New Leaf site was characterised by positive relationships between staff and pupils and a calm and purposeful atmosphere in lessons, leading to pupils concentrating well on their learning. Pupils' books and folders showed some improved progress being made, particularly for the less able pupils and those with SEND.

The teaching of reading needs further attention across the PRU. An accelerated reading programme has been introduced, which is proving helpful to some pupils. However, this does not meet the needs of enough pupils, some of whom have poor reading skills and need to be taught systematically to read. At key stage 4, some reading tests have been carried out by the providers but there is no clear plan to work with pupils who need additional specialist teaching.

Since the previous inspection, the alternative provision manager has analysed the provision of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education at the alternative provision placements. She has created a bank of resources for PSHE which key workers will be able to use and to teach as a tailored programme with the pupils. As reported at the time of the previous inspection, there is no systematic provision for careers education, advice and guidance.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress at key stages 1–3 is inconsistent. Poor attendance is often a factor where pupils are making less progress, but so is the curriculum. Pupils arrive at the PRU with widely varying prior learning, and the curriculum, for example in mathematics and English, is not always structured to fill the gaps in knowledge and understanding that different pupils have in order to allow them to progress further.

Leaders now have better information and monitoring in place for key stage 4, which is helping them to challenge the alternative providers about what level the pupils should be working at. Nevertheless, the issues regarding curriculum depth, breadth and appropriateness remain deep-seated, affecting the progress that pupils make and the standards they reach. Only eight pupils sat a GCSE examination this year in English, and six in mathematics. There are no other GCSE courses on offer. The PRU anticipates that all but four pupils are likely to gain at least some qualifications. These are mainly Level 1 or Entry Level qualifications, although some are at Level 2.

External support

Since the previous inspection, the LA has not provided enough support for the PRU. While improvements at the PRU are evident, they are fragile. As noted earlier in this

report, the continued large number of permanently excluded pupils being put onto the PRU's roll is undermining leaders' ability to tackle the many issues that already exist. The support provided by the LA is not proportionate to the challenges that the PRU is having to face. Insufficient support has been provided to improve attendance, an issue which the previous inspection report noted needed urgent action.

A group of officers from the LA meets monthly with the headteacher and senior leaders as part of their 'team around the school' process. LA officers challenge PRU leaders and LA attendees sometimes go away with actions to complete. However, at times, no action is identified and issues come up again at subsequent meetings. There is not enough focus in these meetings on the support that the LA needs to provide to help the PRU to improve.

The LA has accelerated their processes to find new premises for the PRU. However, in the meantime, despite the improvements made by the staff themselves, a range of issues remain with the building. In particular, noise is not absorbed at all well, which causes distress to pupils with sensory issues. An audit from a specialist in this area within the LA, followed by appropriate action, would go some way towards mitigating the negative effects of the building on pupils' learning while a suitable building is found.

The new assistant director is well aware of the need for more practical support to be given by the LA. The 'education placement solutions panel' is very new but has the potential to help in terms of suitable placements for pupils who may be better placed in another mainstream school rather than in the PRU. The LA has recently made a commitment to put more support into the PRU in the near future to help to improve attendance, something that is urgently needed. Improvements are also needed in the quality and consistency of information provided to the PRU when pupils are admitted. The PRU continues to benefit from the positive support provided by the school improvement partner.