

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



10 July 2019

Miss Sonia Lockett
Headteacher
Stafford Pupil Referral Unit at the Stables
The Stables
The Hollies
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST16 1BY

Dear Miss Lockett

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Stafford Pupil Referral Unit at the Stables

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in July 2018. 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 actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the management committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. 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 July 2018

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements, by:
 - reducing the number of pupils on part-time timetables
 - working closely with local authorities to ensure that children looked after receive their entitlement to a full-time education.
- Improve the attendance rates of all pupils so they attend school regularly, by implementing and embedding recently planned strategies to raise levels of attendance.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - sharpening improvement plans to ensure that actions are specific and include clear, measurable criteria for determining success
 - ensuring that there is consistency in the staff's application of the school's behaviour management policy
 - embedding the revised assessment procedures so pupils' progress is tracked carefully and used to set high expectations
 - ensuring members of the management committee maintain a tight focus on, and hold leaders to account for, raising pupils' achievement and rapidly increasing levels of attendance.
- Secure at least good teaching, learning and assessment to improve outcomes for all pupils, by:
 - making sure all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information well to match learning tasks more closely to pupils' individual needs and capabilities
 - providing an appropriate reading programme, complete with resources, to address the needs of pupils with poor literacy skills
 - creating better opportunities for the most able pupils to tackle more challenging work to enable them to attain higher standards
 - ensuring staff know, and take into account when planning for, the specific needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25 June 2019

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and other leaders, members of the school's management committee (including the chair), the attendance officer, other school staff, and two groups of pupils. I held telephone conversations with the school's special educational needs consultant and two commissioners from the local authority. I evaluated the school's improvement plan. I visited several classes to observe teaching and learning. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's single central record of recruitment checks, school policies, leaders' action plans, attendance registers, management committee meeting minutes and electronic safeguarding documents. I also reviewed information on the school's website.

The inspection focused on all of the areas for improvement that were identified at the school's last section 5 inspection.

Context

The vice-chair of the management committee resigned during the spring term and has been replaced by an existing member of the committee. The behaviour manager resigned in the spring term and has since been replaced. The deputy headteacher also resigned and a new deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2019. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) resigned in the spring term. Leaders have made interim arrangements to cover the SENCo's role, but no permanent replacement has been appointed at this point.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the last monitoring inspection, leaders, working in partnership with the school's management committee, have channelled their energies more productively into addressing the school's weaknesses. There is a clearer sense of purpose and a commitment to the school's priorities for improvement. You have developed your wider leadership team and shared responsibilities more evenly. This in turn has afforded you additional time to support the work of other leaders. As a result, there is now greater consistency across the school in the way that staff manage behaviour, promote good attendance and teach effectively to meet the needs of all pupils.

Since January, the school's management committee has been instrumental in speeding up the pace of change and influencing strategic decision making. Led by a strong, determined chair, the management committee is now relentless in its quest to help leaders improve pupils' behaviour, increase rates of attendance, secure good-quality teaching and learning, and ensure that pupils are kept as safe as possible. The management committee now holds regular meetings to check on the

school's performance. This includes visiting the school during the working day to experience, first-hand, the impact of the changes that leaders have made. Their discussions are strategic, although informed by their understanding of the complex issues faced by pupils and how these affect their learning. The management committee asks challenging questions of the headteacher, and holds her and other staff rigorously to account for pupils' outcomes.

Last term, leaders revised the school improvement plan. They sharpened objectives and added clarity to their intended goals. The updated plan is appropriate and provides the management committee with the necessary information to help them evaluate leaders' actions effectively. You, ably supported by middle leaders, have worked hard to adopt a collective approach to school improvement – all staff are on board with the changes. They are much clearer about priorities and are all pulling in the same direction. This is resulting in a greater consistency of approach and a more settled, effective learning environment for pupils.

Safeguarding arrangements are now effective. You have extended the safeguarding team to include a deputy designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The deputy DSL has already completed appropriate training and has a good working knowledge of a range of safeguarding matters. Staff training has been more carefully matched to address specific safeguarding needs related to pupils' needs. For example, staff have a deeper understanding about county lines and criminal exploitation. Leaders provide staff with weekly updates to ensure that they stay abreast of any new developments in safeguarding practice. As a result, staff keep a close eye on pupils and act quickly when they have a concern. Staff works closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Leaders have continued to work successfully on reducing the number of pupils on part-time timetables. Those who continue to attend school part time have their arrangements more regularly reviewed, with the intention that pupils access full-time education as soon as possible. Moreover, the school has put measures in place to check on pupils' safety and welfare more rigorously when they are not in school. Leaders' good working relations with different local authority's virtual schools help to provide pupils with the most appropriate support to help them attend regularly and achieve well.

Leaders and the management committee have been in discussion with the local authority with regard to the building's limited space and unsuitability. Progress with this issue is beginning to gain pace, and leaders are exploring different options. As an interim measure, it has been agreed with the local authority that the pupil roll will not increase beyond 45 until alternative suitable arrangements for accommodating pupils are found. The school also has plans to use premises at Rodbaston campus (South Staffordshire College) to alleviate the pressure of pupil numbers and space.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Pupils' attendance continues to rise, although it still remains low when compared with that of all pupils nationally. You have engaged the services of an external company to carry out home visits when pupils fail to attend school. Leaders' tightening up of procedures has helped to encourage more pupils to attend. Now, with the exception of six pupils on part-time timetables, all pupils are offered a full-time timetable (often comprising school and alternative provision). It was encouraging to see pupils who have not attended school at all for a considerable amount of time now starting to reintegrate into school and begin learning again.
- All staff now apply the school's behaviour management policy with greater consistency. This is helping to improve pupils' behaviour because teachers communicate and reinforce their expectations more consistently. Evidence in books indicates that pupils settle down to work more quickly and sustain their engagement in tasks for longer. Pupils say that behaviour in school is better, and a marked improvement compared with a year ago. There have been a handful of fixed-term exclusions since the last monitoring inspection, a notable reduction compared with the beginning of the academic year.
- Leaders have implemented a range of strategies that have led to improvements in the quality of teaching. Whole-staff training has focused on key aspects of teaching, such as differentiation and questioning. However, there is still further work to do to meet the needs of the most able pupils. During visits to lessons, I saw how teachers use and apply their new knowledge. This is helping to improve the quality of teaching. The school's assessment system is now more embedded in teachers' everyday practice. Staff use assessment information more effectively to target what pupils need to learn next to develop their knowledge and understanding.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- As a result of staff absence, improvements to the provision for pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been delayed. Some teachers do not take enough account of pupils' SEND, including objectives in education, health and care (EHC) plans, when planning learning. This is slowing pupils' progress. However, during the spring term, you commissioned a SEND specialist consultant for nine days to support the school. They spent time reviewing current arrangements, dealing with outstanding EHC plan applications, and updating SEN policies and the SEN information report, as well as a range of other operational matters. This is a good start, although you recognise that there is still considerable work to do before all pupils with SEND are having their needs fully met.
- Leaders have introduced a new reading scheme to support pupils who find reading difficult. This specific support for key stage 3 pupils is making a positive difference and is helping pupils to make better progress in their reading.

However, arrangements to support the weakest readers are not as effective because there is no systematic approach in place for the teaching of early reading skills, including phonics. In addition, leaders have not given enough emphasis to finding ways to encourage pupils to read for enjoyment, and therefore practise their reading skills more frequently.

External support

Leaders have received a relatively limited amount of external support since the time of the last monitoring visit. However, capitalising on the links made through the management committee members, leaders have made arrangements for staff to observe, or work alongside, staff in other local schools. For example, the lead for teaching and learning has had the opportunity to visit another school to see how its lead for teaching and learning works. Because these visits have only recently started, it is too early to see the impact of this work.