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Mrs Sue Rogers
Interim Executive Principal
Steiner Academy Frome
Park Road
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Dear Mrs Rogers

Special measures monitoring inspection of Steiner Academy Frome

Following my visit with Paul Williams, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 11–12 September, 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 November 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 not 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 Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take immediate action to safeguard pupils by ensuring that:
 - keeping pupils safe takes priority in all aspects of the school's work so that staff and parents feel able to raise concerns at any time
 - records of child protection and the management of allegations are fit for purpose and enable effective oversight of this work
 - systems and approaches to recruiting staff include all necessary suitability checks
 - there is a clear code of conduct for staff behaviour
 - staff receive and follow clear guidance about using physical restraint with pupils
 - pupils are adequately supervised at all times.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders, middle leaders and governors understand their roles and responsibilities and fulfil them effectively
 - governors hold senior leaders to account rigorously
 - complaints are investigated thoroughly and fairly, and outcomes are communicated clearly to complainants and used to make improvements to the school
 - leaders check the impact of their work on pupils' safety, welfare and achievement
 - all pupils who have SEND receive effective support that enables them to make good progress
 - additional funding is spent appropriately and improves pupils' outcomes
 - the curriculum meets pupils' needs, enables them to achieve well and prepares them effectively for the future.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare so that it is good, by ensuring that:
 - the behaviour policy is fit for purpose, sets out high expectations and clear, safe and proportionate sanctions, and is applied consistently across the school
 - low-level disruption in lessons is minimised
 - pupils of all ages learn how to keep themselves safe
 - secondary pupils receive effective careers information and guidance.

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils' outcomes are good, by ensuring that:
 - staff have consistently high expectations for pupils' achievement and attitudes to learning
 - learning is suitably demanding for pupils of all abilities and builds on what they know and can do
 - teachers make use of effective questions and checks on pupils' learning during lessons to adjust and increase the impact of their teaching
 - teachers in the kindergarten enable children to develop their speaking and listening skills effectively.

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 pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how the use of this funding may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 September 2019 to 12 September 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive principal, trustees, staff, groups of pupils and parents.

Inspectors visited lessons accompanied by leaders and scrutinised pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times.

Context

There has been significant turbulence in the staffing and leadership of the school, including governance, since the school was deemed to require special measures in November 2018. At the time of this visit, a new interim executive principal had been in post for five days. She will be working at the school two days a week. There are 17 new members of staff and a new chair of trustees.

The school is seeking a new academy sponsor, but this rebrokering is yet to take place.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The curriculum is not ambitious enough and is not well planned. Pupils' experiences do not help them to achieve well. As a result, they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. They are not confident why they are carrying out the work they are doing in lessons and/or how it links with what they have done in the past. Too many pupils are unable to draw on previous learning in subjects to make the progress of which they are capable.

The interim executive principal has quickly identified the systemic weaknesses in the curriculum. But efforts to establish a well sequenced curriculum are at an extremely early stage and so teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve remain too low.

Teachers are now receiving some curriculum guidance and training. But there is no systematic work to improve teachers' skills. Consequently, teachers do not have a secure understanding of the subjects they teach or how pupils learn. For example, pupils are not being taught phonics systematically. Reading books are not well matched to pupils' phonic knowledge. When pupils read, too many do not have the skills to help them to decode unknown words.

Leaders' work to improve the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has been too slow. Changes in the leadership of this area of the schools work have impeded the quality of provision for these pupils. There is

currently not the capacity in the school to ensure pupils who have SEND have high-quality support. The interim executive principal is working to increase the number of staff with SEND expertise.

Children in the kindergarten are eager and ready to learn. Relationships between staff and children are strong. Children listen with enjoyment to the teachers. They are happy to join in with rhymes and stories. The renewed focus on developing childrens' speaking and listening skills is carefully woven through the curriculum. As a result, children are increasingly articulate. They can express views and explain with greater clarity what they are doing. For example, the youngest children could tell the inspectors how to make bread.

Careers education is not effective. Leaders do not give older pupils enough information to prepare them for future success in education, training or employment.

There has been improvement in pupils' behaviour since the previous inspection. The improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning are as a result of the revised behaviour policy. This policy clearly sets out the sanctions and rewards. It is understood by staff and pupils. Pupils are polite, courteous and well mannered and generally engage well with their teachers and their learning. While pupils say behaviour has improved and that bullying is now extremely rare some told inspectors that not all teachers ensure that pupils behave consistently well in lessons. Staff agree with this view.

While pupils speak favourably about their school and the kindness and support the teachers give them, this is not yet reflected in their attendance. Too many pupils do not attend regularly, and overall attendance remains well below the national average.

Pupils from the lower and middle school, in particular, remain uncertain about how best to keep themselves safe. Too many are not yet able to talk with confidence about how best to keep themselves as safe as possible.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Significant turbulence in leadership has had a detrimental impact on this school. The school has not been improving quickly enough to secure the necessary changes identified at the previous inspection.

The recently appointed interim executive principal has quickly established an appropriate timetable for improvement. There is now a clear leadership structure in place alongside an appropriate programme for staff development. While these actions represent a step change in securing the rapid improvement required, the recency of such actions mean that it is too early to show sufficient demonstrable impact.

Leaders and governors were too slow to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection. Consequently, too much time was lost and the school has not improved as it should have done during this time. Weak school improvement planning resulted in a quality improvement plan that was not fit for purpose, which significantly reduced leaders' ability to improve provision.

Until recently, governance of the school has been dysfunctional. As a result, school leaders were not held to account for the quality of education pupils receive and improvements lacked sufficient pace and/or rigour. Such disarray in governance and leadership led to confusion about who was responsible for the quality of education in the school. The recommendation by inspectors at the previous inspection to undertake an external review of governance did not happen.

Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils continues to be spent inappropriately. For example, funding has been allocated to the administration of the school and not for the pupils. The school was advised to undertake an external review of pupil premium. Leaders did not commission a review and disadvantaged pupils are still not receiving the additional support and guidance they need to achieve well.

Overall the culture of safeguarding is improving, but leaders recognise that there is still work to do to fully minimise risks to pupils and keep them safe. For example, although leaders ensure that safeguarding training for staff is in place, they do not routinely check the understanding of staff in all aspects of safeguarding. There is a clear code of conduct in place for staff behaviour and the management of allegations against staff has improved. Parents spoken to by inspectors are positive about the school and now feel able to raise concerns with leaders.

Improvements to systems to safeguard children have been made. The single central record meets statutory requirements. Systems and approaches to recruiting staff now include all necessary suitability checks. Documentation and record-keeping has been strengthened and child protection records are fit for purpose.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The newly appointed interim executive principal has significant experience and expertise in improving the quality of education. She has quickly gained the respect of the staff. She is driving improvements forward quickly.
- Staff are willing to engage with leaders to rapidly improve the quality of education in the school.
- Leaders are securing external support from providers who have a proven record of success in education.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There remains uncertainty of the future direction of the school. The date has not been secured for when the school will be rebrokered.

External support

The support provided by Bridgwater College has not been sufficiently effective. Interim school leaders have not been provided with the support and guidance required to tackle the significant areas needed to improve the quality of education pupils receive. Consequently, the pace of improvement has been far too slow.