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13 December 2019

Ms Lise Sugden and Mrs Mary Rayner
Interim headteachers
The Harbour School
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Cambridgeshire
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Dear Ms Sugden and Mrs Rayner

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Harbour School

Following my visit to your school on 26–27 November 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 March 2019.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the Interim Executive Board, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2019.

- Ensure the safety of pupils by making sure that:
 - action is taken to ensure that pupils are safe on the school site
 - all staff follow the school's policy and procedures when taking pupils out on trips and visits, and that visits are adequately staffed
 - risk assessments are detailed, specific to the event and cover the potential risks to pupils and staff
 - urgent action is taken to ensure that pupils' liberty is not restricted in the school.
- Urgently and rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders take swift action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
 - the school's curriculum meets pupils' academic and personal development needs
 - English and mathematics leaders are effective in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all key stages
 - leaders' evaluations of all aspects of the school's work are accurate, sharply focused and used to inform the school's improvement planning
 - there are high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan work that addresses the learning needs of pupils and enables them to deepen their knowledge and understanding
 - teachers provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their writing.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - ensuring that staff follow the school's behaviour policy
 - ensuring that pupils' behaviour does not put the safety of others at risk.
- Improve school attendance and reduce persistent absence.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 November 2019

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, and held meetings with the following school staff:

- the two interim headteachers
- the assistant headteacher
- the education social worker
- the leader of the primary provision
- the key stage 3 leader (also the leader for mathematics)
- the leader of English
- the business manager
- teaching and non-teaching staff.

The inspector met with three members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), including the chair, the human resources lead and the lead for safeguarding pupils. A meeting was also held with the local authority's lead for special educational needs.

The inspector met with two groups of pupils and spoke with other pupils informally. Three parents spoke with the inspector on the telephone.

Context

The headteacher has been absent since the previous inspection and left the school at the end of October 2019. Two interim headteachers led the school during the summer term 2019. One interim headteacher remains in the post and another joined full time in September 2019. Four members of staff are on long-term absence. Since the previous inspection, two teachers have left the school and two have joined, and there are new leaders for English, primary provision and key stage 3.

In April 2019, the local authority established an IEB to provide governance for the school and replace the governing body. A local multi-academy trust is supporting the school. There are no firm plans in place for the school to become an academy.

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

The effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements

Significant changes have been made to provide an environment where pupils and staff feel safe and can expect to be safe. New arrangements are in place to assess

risks thoroughly, to take actions to reduce risks quickly, and to manage pupils' behaviour successfully. Doors are no longer locked as a means of managing pupils' behaviour. Within days of the previous inspection, 27 doors were replaced. Windows are no longer screwed shut.

Risks are appropriately assessed, and reasonable actions taken to minimise the identified risks. Each pupil has a risk reduction plan. The plans are well understood by staff and pupils, and they are monitored carefully by leaders.

School trips no longer happen ad hoc. Procedures for taking pupils off-site are thorough, not only addressing pupils' welfare, but also the educational purpose of the activities planned. Risk assessments are required each time pupils go off-site for activities, even if the activity is a regular occurrence, such as ice-skating. Risks are also assessed for staff, making sure that reasonable adjustments are made for any identified individual personal circumstances.

High priority is given to the health and safety of all who access the school site. The size and position of the school site, and the wide age range and needs of pupils on roll, mean that risk assessments need to be regularly reviewed for their effectiveness in keeping everybody safe. Risks are reviewed frequently, and concerns are considered appropriately, but the current written risk assessment policy needs updating to reflect current practice.

Leaders work closely with local authority officers to check the well-being of pupils on roll who do not receive their education on the school site. The arrangements for those waiting for an alternative placement are reviewed frequently.

The single central register of employment checks is in good order. A new system is in place. The information recorded on the register is checked by senior staff for any errors and omissions.

The quality of education

There is still a lot to do to make sure that pupils have the education that successfully meets their academic needs. New appointments have gone a long way to get things moving. The new leaders for English, mathematics, primary provision, key stage 3 and key stage 4 have clear plans for what needs to improve. Some of the planned actions have been started already, such as extending the range of subjects taught, teaching mathematical concepts in the same way across the school, and giving pupils more opportunities to improve writing.

Developments for the curriculum and teaching are sensibly linked to those for assessing pupils' current skills, knowledge and understanding. In writing, for example, now that pupils are writing more frequently and more extensively, teachers have the information they need to show pupils how to improve their work.

Alongside a wider range of subjects and more opportunities across the curriculum

for writing, leaders have, quite rightly, identified that pupils' reading and spelling need to improve rapidly. A structured programme for teaching phonics, matched to pupils' individual starting points, now needs to be in place quickly so that reading is not a barrier to pupils' success across all subjects of the curriculum.

Although improved, the curriculum does not cover pupils' entitlement to the full range of national curriculum subjects and religious education. However, there is more to it than getting enough subjects taught, particularly for key stages 3 and 4. It is not clear whether the time available for teaching the curriculum, the skills and knowledge taught in each subject, and opportunities beyond the national curriculum are suitable and sufficient to prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education.

School trips now have a clear educational purpose and are much enjoyed by pupils. Risk assessments now make sure that pupils' emotional and social needs are well considered so that trips can go ahead safely, such as the trips to Hunstanton and Graffham Water.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes

The new behaviour policy and reward scheme are working well to help most pupils behave appropriately most of the time. Inappropriate behaviour no longer interrupts learning routinely. Pupils are more interested in what they are taught and are more likely to behave well. When inappropriate behaviour occurs, staff are much less likely than previously to remove pupils from class. Pupils often respond well to adult support, which helps them refocus on what they are supposed to be doing. The two seclusion rooms are no longer used.

Poor behaviour, including inappropriate language, is challenged by staff according to the agreed policy. Rewards and consequences are well understood by staff and pupils, which helps pupils take responsibility for their actions. Increasingly, staff adapt what they do to support each pupil individually, within the principles of the behaviour policy.

Attendance is improving for some pupils. A review of transport arrangements and pupils' improved behaviour have helped to reduce absence. As previously, there has been no permanent exclusion. The number of fixed-term exclusions remain too high.

There are more recorded incidents of inappropriate behaviour and restraint since the previous inspection. The increase is a result of better recording than before and pupils adjusting to higher expectations for their conduct.

Preparations for the school's transition to academy status

Discussions about the school converting to an academy have taken place between local authority leaders, the IEB and the regional schools commissioner. A suitable academy sponsor has not been identified. There is no prospective date for conversion to academy status.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Interim leaders have given strong leadership since the previous inspection. Swift, decisive actions addressed the immediate concerns for pupils' safety and well-being. Additional concerns were identified and addressed. The many changes that have taken place have happened in collaboration with staff, including writing the new school development plan. Reasons for the changes are well understood and, in general, staff feel well supported, involved and confident that they have the skills and to make the necessary improvements.

Senior leaders and the IEB have an honest, accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They gather detailed information from assessments, incident reports, attendance, and the views of parents and pupils. The information is used well to challenge performance and look for solutions to problems.

It is too early to see how well pupils benefit from the work of the new leaders for English, primary provision and key stage 3. What is clear, though, is that staff have accurately identified the priorities, they are enthusiastic and already getting on with some of the developments needed. Their work has already increased the overall capacity within leadership and staff to address the issues identified for improvement at the previous inspection.

The right things are now in place to manage pupils' behaviour effectively, which means that improvements to the curriculum and teaching can now take on a much-needed higher priority. Interim leaders have skilfully pieced together the support, training and resources needed, so that improvements in one aspect of the work complement those in another. This joined-up approach means that improvements to behaviour lead to higher expectations for learning, which, in turn increase pupils' enjoyment in the subjects that have been carefully chosen to get them interested in what they are taught. Similarly, improvements in assessment are helping teachers to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge, and to think about how to adapt what they teach and how they teach.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The plans in place, the decisions made, and the actions taken by the IEB and the interim headteachers are rooted firmly on sustainable improvements. This approach is effective in developing staff's skills and gaining their confidence in

their ability to do the job that needs to be done.

- Staff are kept well informed. Their views are sought frequently, and they have been actively encouraged to get involved in the plans for improvement from the beginning. This approach is helping the whole school community work together on the journey of improvement. Teaching and non-teaching staff know what needs to change, they understand why the changes are needed, and they are clear about how to play their part.
- Leaders have prioritised improving the learning environment. A complete overhaul of the resources available to pupils, and the redecoration of classrooms and corridors is well underway. Pupils and staff have a much better environment for teaching and learning, which, in turn, has improved pupils' attitudes to learning.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- No weaknesses identified.

External support

- External support comes primarily from local authority leaders and a local academy trust. By working closely together, the IEB, the trust and the local authority provide timely support and significant challenge, which is successfully addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Following the previous inspection, local authority leaders quickly established an IEB. The members of the IEB are highly experienced and they know what good practice looks like. They are steadfast in championing the rights of the pupils to high-quality, full-time education. No stone is left unturned.
- The local authority provided financial support to immediately secure improvements for the health and safety of the site. The local authority provides financial support for current interim leadership of the school. Local authority advisers provide support for the newly appointed leaders, for example in mathematics.
- A local academy trust provides support for interim leadership, subject-specialist teachers and assessment.
- There have been 13 new pupils this term, which is a lot for everyone to cope with. So far, new pupils have settled well, but the pace of future admissions needs to be considered carefully so as not to overwhelm staff and pupils, or get in the way of the work that still needs to be done.