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Mr S Rhodes
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rhodes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Thrybergh Academy and Sports College

Following my visit with Karine Hendley, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 4–5 February 2020, 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 January 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 trust's statement of action is 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 Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Shaw
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve so that all groups of pupils make good progress
 - there is a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy
 - teachers plan effectively to support pupils with SEND and challenge the most able pupils, making sure that work is well matched to their needs
 - there are increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their written skills in subjects other than English and develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics, particularly in the primary phase
 - pupils take pride in the presentation of their work
 - there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics
 - teachers take account of pupils' current knowledge and understanding when planning lessons.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - developing common systems and procedures across the all-through school
 - ensuring that improvement plans incorporate interim milestones so that actions are regularly reviewed
 - further developing the skills and expertise of middle and senior leaders to drive improvement
 - urgently reviewing the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils
 - monitoring the use and impact of additional funding
 - reviewing and strengthening governance so that governors play a more effective role in bringing about rapid improvement.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development and welfare by:
 - improving pupils' attendance and reducing the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school
 - further reducing the rates of fixed-term exclusion and incidents of low-level disruption
 - ensuring that pupils treat adults and each other with respect
 - fostering pupils' understanding of different cultures and the importance of British values
 - developing pupils' resilience and improving their attitudes towards learning.

An external review of governance is recommended 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 is recommended in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 4 February 2020 to 5 February 2020

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. We met the acting headteacher, senior staff and subject leaders. We met the headteacher and other leaders of the primary phase. We met the chief executive officer of the trust which is providing support to the school. We also met the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. We visited lessons and looked at examples of pupils' work. We talked with pupils in meetings and around the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the Wickersley Partnership Trust (the trust) has taken on a support role for the school, at the request of the Department for Education. This includes support with staffing capacity, especially at senior leader level, and for staff professional development. The trust has supported the school with the dissolution of the governing body and the creation of a new governing body, including a new chair and vice-chair of governors. In the primary phase, a headteacher, assistant headteacher and pastoral leader were appointed in September 2019. In the secondary phase, you were the acting headteacher at the time of the previous inspection and continue to be so. You are supported by a trust associate headteacher. A process for the appointment of a substantive headteacher is due to take place in the days immediately following this monitoring visit. A member of the senior leadership team was appointed as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) for the secondary phase as of September 2019. It is proposed by the Department for Education, the regional schools commissioner and the Education and Skills Funding Agency that the school will transfer to the Wickersley Partnership Trust. It is hoped and expected that this will take place during the current academic year. It is planned that the primary and secondary phases will be de-coupled at the point of transfer and become separate schools.

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

At the previous inspection, you were asked to address several aspects of the quality of education that pupils receive. You were asked to ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. To meet this requirement, with the support of the trust, you have taken decisive action to improve the quality of teaching in the school. In the primary phase, new leaders have much higher expectations of staff. The staffing restructure enabled you to place subject-specialist teachers in their main areas of expertise. This has led to a greater understanding by staff of what is required in different subjects for pupils to do well. Teachers use subject-specific vocabulary with their pupils as a way of raising pupils' aspirations. Pupils generally agree that while there is still some way to go, teachers have started to be more aspirational.

You were asked to ensure that there is a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy. Since the previous inspection, leaders have made the decision to operate the primary and secondary phases as two separate schools, ahead of the expected transfer to the trust. Consequently, you have approached the teaching of literacy differently in each phase. In the primary phase, leaders have introduced new processes for the teaching of reading and the improvement of pupils' writing. There are early signs that pupils' extended writing skills are beginning to improve, but there is still work to do in a systematic way to improve their grammar, punctuation and spelling. In the secondary phase, it is very early days with regard to a phase-wide literacy strategy. You have identified pupils' weak literacy skills as a barrier to their learning, which is reflected in school improvement plans and curriculum intent documents. Strategies such as the wider use of subject-specific vocabulary, 'word of the week' and checking pupils' work for literacy have been introduced. Leaders acknowledge that the application of these strategies is inconsistent at present.

The previous inspection report stated that work should be done to improve the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The recently appointed SENCo in the secondary phase has started the process of getting to grips with what needs to be done. She has begun to establish an accurate register of pupils with SEND and to put in place the necessary support, particularly for examination access arrangements. In the primary phase, the headteacher is also the SENCo. She also had to start with the basics and begin to get an accurate identification of pupils with SEND. Both SENCos are taking the necessary and appropriate action to get the right support in place, but such was the disarray of provision for SEND that this is a major undertaking.

You were asked to address some important aspects of the primary curriculum, such as pupils' writing in subjects other than English and their mathematics knowledge, skills and understanding. To support this, you have introduced new and structured schemes for pupils' English and mathematics studies. These have started to have a positive effect, but it is early days. This is partly because, as a consequence of the weak previous curriculum and inadequate teaching, pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge. In the wider curriculum, teachers are beginning to teach with an appropriate focus on subject-specific vocabulary and pupils' writing. Pupils in some classes were knowledgeable about their topics. This is still very inconsistent, however.

You were asked to address weaknesses in the teaching of phonics in the primary phase. To address this, you have prioritised the teaching of phonics. For instance, you have started to use a particular phonics scheme. You provided appropriate training for staff in the use of this scheme, but staffing changes and staff skills have limited the effectiveness of the training. Pupils have previously experienced a plethora of ineffective phonics approaches, so they have substantial gaps in their understanding. This makes the challenge all the greater. Improvements to the teaching of phonics have started, but there is a long way to go.

Additionally, you were tasked with improving the presentation of pupils' work. This is because it is reflective of pupils' resilience and engagement as learners, and of teachers' expectations. There is evidence in pupils' books that pupils often do have a pride in their work. There continues to be variability, but pupils attempt to finish their work and they try to keep their work well presented.

The previous inspection report made several requirements in relation to improvements in leadership and management. One requirement was for the development of common systems and procedures across the all-through school. However, as noted above, the governors and the trust have decided to operate as two separate schools once the transfer to the trust is made. Consequently, and understandably, you have not addressed this particular area for improvement as the school's context has changed.

You have taken action to ensure that your improvement plans are fit for purpose. They include appropriate milestones to enable you to check progress along the way. The plans include specific reference to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

You were asked to develop the skills and expertise of senior leaders and middle leaders. In the primary phase, the recently appointed leaders are playing crucial roles in the school's recovery. For instance, they have focused on the professional development of staff in addressing areas identified in the previous inspection report, such as the phonics programme, behaviour systems and SEND. In the secondary phase, leaders at all levels have benefited from the support provided by the trust, such as subject network meetings. Senior leaders have introduced new systems for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and for the development of the new curriculum. While this is a substantial step forward in leaders' determination to improve the school, it needs to be more sharply focused on holding middle leaders to account for agreed actions.

The trust undertook an immediate review of the curriculum when it began its support role with the school. As a result, changes were made to the curriculum so that pupils were following courses that were in their best interests. You refer to this as an 'interim curriculum', a staging-post on the way to joining the trust, at which point the trust's curriculum model will be implemented.

It was recommended in the report of the previous inspection that a review of the use of the pupil premium funding be carried out. You were unable to do this because the funding had been subsumed into the main school budget. This made it impossible to review how the funding had been used for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils.

It was also recommended that you carry out a review into the effectiveness of governance. With the trust's support, you did this. Following the review, the governing body was dissolved and a new one put in place. Governors have a clear

view of the school's strengths and its weaknesses. They know what needs to be done to support leaders in bringing the school out of special measures.

The final area you were asked to improve was pupils' personal development. This included improving pupils' attendance. You have taken appropriate action to put the necessary foundations in place to bring about improvement. There are early signs of the effectiveness of your new systems in the primary phase, where the rate of persistent absence has reduced markedly. Signs of improvement in the secondary phase are less evident at the moment, as the new systems and a new attendance team become established. Pupils told us that they have noticed a heightened emphasis on the need for good attendance. However, the school needs the support of some of its pupils' parents and carers in getting the children to school, and not taking unnecessary days' absence here and there.

You were asked to reduce the rate of fixed-term exclusion and the incidence of low-level disruption. You made changes to the behaviour system recently, which has seen a reduction in behaviour incidents and the use of exclusion in both phases. Pupils in the secondary phase said that they think that behaviour is getting better, but that it is a long way from where they think it should be. Pupils in the primary phase said that teachers are inconsistent in their use of the school's behaviour system.

You have taken action to improve pupils' understanding of different cultures and the importance of British values. In both phases, you have recently introduced new curriculums for pupils' personal development, including their understanding of different cultures and British values. Pupils' awareness of these aspects is patchy, however, with some having stronger understanding than others. Pupils report that some staff are more consistent in their delivery of the school's personal development programme than others. During the two days of the inspection, inspectors saw and heard pupils and staff treating one another respectfully.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders in school and trust leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for providing a high-quality education for pupils. They have taken some tough decisions to begin the process of improving the school. Central to this is a shared belief in the entitlement of all pupils to a far better deal than the one they have received until recently. There is still much work to be done to get the school to a position where it is providing a good education, but the work is now under way. Middle leaders feel both supported and challenged by the heightened expectations placed on them: they are pleased and relieved that the school is being steered back on course and that they have an important role to play in this. Governors know what needs to be done in the best interests of the pupils. Leaders' plans are reflective of the areas for improvement set down for them at the previous inspection.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' introduction of new systems to start to sort out attendance, behaviour and provision for pupils with SEND are beginning to bring about improvements.
- The prioritisation of reading in the primary phase has set phonics teaching on the right path.
- A renewed focus on the quality of teaching and teachers' expectations of pupils is evident.
- The quality and effectiveness of the trust's support for leaders are crucial to the school's improvement.
- The implementation of a curriculum, including for pupils' personal development, which meets the needs of pupils more appropriately has started to improve the quality of education.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Although leaders have introduced new systems for the improvement of attendance, it is early days. Attendance overall remains low.
- Staffing turbulence in the primary phase has limited improvements to phonics teaching.
- Behaviour is improving but it is fragile. Pupils are not at the point of self-regulation.
- Provision for pupils with SEND is at a very early stage and a strategy is in place, but leaders are not currently monitoring SEND provision in classrooms.
- Leaders have introduced systems to monitor, review and evaluate the quality of education, but steps to sharply hold middle leaders to account are not as developed as they need to be.
- Pupils' understanding of other cultures and British values is improving, but it is inconsistent and patchy.

External support

The trust has provided substantial support since it was partnered with the school in March 2019. It has supported the new governing body in achieving financial stability, partly through the completion of a substantial staffing restructure. The trust's restructure has also supported the school in introducing an interim curriculum with subject specialists teaching subjects. Leadership capacity has been built in both the primary and secondary phases. As a result, systems are now in place for much sharper monitoring and evaluation of school performance information. Systems for behaviour, attendance, SEND, the quality of teaching and the quality of subject leadership have been introduced. Taken together, these support elements have enabled leaders to stabilise the school and begin the process of taking the school out of special measures.