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Neil Clapham
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clapham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hunters Hill College

Following my visit with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Sarah Ashley, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 8 and 9 June 2021, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered 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 school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 June 2021

Context

This special school caters primarily for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The school is due to close on 31 August 2021.

A new interim headteacher was appointed on 19 April 2021. He will remain at the school on a full-time basis until the school's closure. The previous interim headteacher left at the end of the spring term 2021.

There were no pupils present on the Hunters Hill College site at the time of the inspection. Around two thirds of pupils currently receive their education in temporary placements at other schools across the West Midlands. It is planned that most of these placements will become permanent before the end of this term. Just over one tenth of pupils receive home tuition. Just under one quarter of pupils are learning remotely.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Over time, leaders have not addressed, with sufficient speed, many of the weaknesses that were identified at the section 5 inspection. Leaders' attempts to resolve deep-rooted issues have been hampered by significant staffing matters and serious problems with the school site, for example a collapsed ceiling.

The new interim headteacher has only been in post for a matter of weeks and has rightly focused attention on improving safeguarding procedures. Leaders have continued to try and secure permanent school places for pupils. However, there are still too many pupils who are not receiving a curriculum that meets their needs. Leaders have not checked to see whether what pupils are learning in their temporary schools is building on their prior knowledge and skills. With the exception of a few pupils, leaders have not prioritised the teaching of reading. Consequently, there are some key stage 4 pupils with immense reading difficulties who are not getting the help and support they need.

The experience for pupils learning at home, who are expected to complete 'work packs' with minimal input from teachers, is poor. Teachers have not put enough thought into what pupils should be learning. In most cases, pupils complete little work and do not make progress. Even when work is done, there are no systems in place to provide pupils with prompt feedback to address any misconceptions that may arise. The interim executive board (IEB) has already identified this issue and tasked leaders with getting more tutors into pupils' homes to provide support.

Pupils who receive direct teaching from the home tuition service experience a better curriculum than those who are solely learning independently at home. However, leaders do not have enough oversight of, nor influence over, the work pupils are

asked to complete. This means that pupils do not build effectively on their prior learning. In addition, teachers do not take enough account of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans when planning learning activities. Pupils are not having their special educational needs met to enable them to make good progress and achieve well.

Not all staff are working cohesively in the best interests of pupils. This is reducing the capacity of the school to make a positive difference to the lives of some very vulnerable pupils. Also, this has meant that senior leaders and a few other staff are carrying out the lion's share of the critical work. Ongoing, unresolved staffing issues continue to negatively affect pupils' life chances.

Leaders' determined efforts to deal with weaknesses in the school's safeguarding practices have paid off. Staff now keep a much closer eye on pupils who are learning remotely. Leaders provide the necessary information to the schools that some pupils are attending temporarily to help keep them safe from harm. Safeguarding arrangements are now effective.

The IEB has stepped up its level of challenge and scrutiny since March. It is holding leaders sharply to account for their decision-making. This is helping to ensure that leaders' actions are targeted at addressing the most pressing issues. The IEB has been a driving force behind the quest to get all pupils an appropriate and permanent school place before the end of the summer term. It has also continued with its push to ensure that Birmingham City Council (BCC) updates all pupils' EHC plans. BCC has picked up the pace and allocated dedicated officers to this undertaking.

For the majority of pupils in temporary schools, leaders have managed the transition process effectively. The new placements are generally working well, apart from some of the curriculum issues. Most pupils have settled into their new schools quickly and their attendance has improved. Pupils speak positively about their new schools and report feeling much safer in comparison to when they were at Hunters Hill College.

Additional support

Owing to the school's imminent closure, almost all external support has been withdrawn. The interim headteacher values the mentoring support that he has received from an experienced chief executive officer of a local multi-academy trust.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance, and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors visited pupils on temporary placement in four different schools. The lead inspector

also examined the single central register of staff recruitment checks. Inspectors considered the responses to 10 staff questionnaires and spoke on the telephone to a small group of parents and carers.