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Michelle Parkes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Parkes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Brookfield School

Following my visit with Chris Field, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 16 and 17 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 most 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 December 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2021

Context

During the pandemic, leaders worked hard to ensure that pupils were receiving an education either remotely or on site. They made sure that pupils were being appropriately safeguarded. Leaders took the opportunity to redevelop the curriculum. They had to adjust some aspects of the curriculum as pupils were not able to access community activities to support the development of their social and independence skills. Now that restrictions are easing, leaders are prioritising these experiences. Staff absence has affected the pace of development of some curriculum areas.

The school's assistant headteacher has been appointed to the substantive deputy headteacher role. A new assistant headteacher has recently been appointed and is due to join the school in September 2021. The trustees have recently established a local governing board. The school is in the process of identifying a new academy sponsor as part of the 'rebrokering' process. Plans are in place to begin a building project at the school to improve the facilities, including additional classrooms and a sports hall, and to bring the school's off-site provision onto the premises. It is anticipated that this work will begin in September 2021.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders and governors have established high expectations for the school. The actions they have taken to improve the school and its curriculum are beginning to have an impact. Staff and parents are both positive about and supportive of the changes that have taken place in the school, particularly since the appointment of the new headteacher. All members of staff who responded to the staff questionnaire said they were proud to be a member of The Brookfield School.

Following the previous remote monitoring visit and the need for more focus on education from a governance perspective, trustees have set up a local governing board. The board includes parent members and individuals with educational expertise to ensure a broad and relevant skill set. Members have completed safeguarding training but need additional training to ensure they understand their statutory responsibilities set out in the school's scheme of delegation.

Leaders have set out their intent for the curriculum, based on the national curriculum, across the school clearly. While much work has been done to develop a suitable curriculum, it remains a priority for development as there is still more to do. Some subjects are better developed than others. There are relative strengths in English and physical education (PE). The curriculum in these subjects is well planned. Pupils are being exposed to a range of reading genres, suitably planned and sequenced. Writing is developing and the subject leader for English has a clear plan for improvement.

Other subjects, including mathematics, remain as work in progress. Currently, there are no medium-term plans informed by the long-term planning of each subject. As a result, plans do not identify a sequence of learning for pupils over time, nor identify key concepts, vocabulary and knowledge that pupils will learn by the end of each year.

The lack of sequencing in curriculum subjects is reflected in the work in pupils' books. Work does not consistently align with long-term planning. In some subjects, the curriculum delivery is not well sequenced and jumps from one topic to another without building on prior learning. For example, pupils completed one lesson on climate areas of the world, then looked at continents, then elements of a rainforest. Leaders have not identified the key skills that pupils need to develop over time to support their knowledge and understanding in subjects such as PE and art. Consequently, pupils' knowledge is not sufficiently embedded in some subjects.

The school's personal, social and health education curriculum is being reviewed. Leaders need to ensure that topics are planned to be delivered at an appropriate time and not constrained by examination specifications. For example, the Year 10 plan includes 'what is puberty?' while menstruation was covered in earlier years. Inspectors saw evidence that when topics are revisited, often because of welfare concerns such as the misuse of drugs and alcohol, pupils are retaining this knowledge well.

The breadth of the curriculum has been affected by the pandemic. Year 9 pupils have not been able to access the humanities curriculum. Off-site PE activities had to be suspended, but these are now resuming. Dance is not included in the PE curriculum, but leaders have plans to address this in order to broaden pupils' experiences in this subject.

Leaders use a suite of commercially produced assessment systems. Information from these assessments are used to inform interventions. Staff have focused specifically on addressing gaps in learning for pupils in key stage 4. As a result, this group of pupils have now completed functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. Most have achieved a level 1 qualification and nearly half have achieved a level 2 qualification.

Assessment of the curriculum is less well developed, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics. However, inspectors saw some effective peer and self-assessment practice in PE. Leaders are tracking pupils' progress in English and mathematics using out-of-date progression guidance materials based on the previous national curriculum, so need to review their approach.

Since pupils have returned to school following the most recent lockdown, leaders have carried out checks on the quality of education via learning walks, visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. They know the strengths and weaknesses in

the curriculum and are working to address these. Most curriculum monitoring remains the responsibility of senior leaders because subject leaders' monitoring is at an earlier stage of development.

The development of early reading and phonics is an emerging strength. Staff have received training in phonics. The early reading leader has a good understanding of the progress pupils are making. There is a comprehensive phonics assessment system that informs the planning and delivery of phonics. Pupils are making progress, with fewer pupils now needing phonics support.

Staff ensure that pupils have reading books matched to their phonics knowledge. Pupils are using their phonics skills to decode words. They are beginning to develop some fluency in reading. The teaching of phonics can sometimes lack pace and focus, resulting in pupils sitting and waiting for a turn and not engaging in an activity. There is not yet enough of a focus on the development of handwriting and spelling in the school. The reading lead recognises this, and a planned move to a new systematic, synthetic scheme in the autumn term is likely to provide a more structured approach to the development of phonics, writing and spelling.

Reading has a prominent profile in the school and classes have well-resourced reading areas. Staff now read to pupils every day to give them experience of listening to a range of stories from different genres. Less confident readers enjoy the opportunity to read aloud to the school guinea pigs.

Staff are now receiving a wide range of professional development opportunities and, as a result, feel more valued. Teachers are now benefiting from opportunities to work with other schools to understand and to share good practice. Work with secondary subject leaders has been more challenging due to the pandemic but plans are in place to enable staff to liaise with teachers in mainstream provision. Staff spoke positively about the support they receive in terms of their workload and well-being. They told inspectors that they do not feel overburdened.

Safeguarding is now well organised and managed. Staff are confident that pupils are kept safe. Pupils told the inspectors they were safe, and inspection evidence confirms this. Senior safeguarding leaders have a good knowledge and oversight of safeguarding concerns and ensure that pupils receive timely support for their welfare, through their work with a wide range of external agencies. Staff know the pupils and their families well, along with the risks in the local area. Staff have been provided with up-to-date training on different aspects of safeguarding, such as child sexual exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse and the 'Prevent' duty. They know how to raise concerns about pupils' welfare and know the procedures to follow if there are concerns about a member of staff's behaviour.

Leaders and staff ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe, both online and out in the community. Pupils recently took part in a 'stop child sexual exploitation' day, enabling them to better understand risks.

Pupils are due to visit the recently installed 'knife angel' at Hereford Cathedral, raising awareness of knife crime and the associated dangers.

Improved safeguarding also extends to much improved systems for the monitoring of the school's off-site and alternative provision. Appropriate safeguarding and health and safety checks of premises and staff have been carried out, including risk assessments. Staff complete individual risk assessments for pupils before they attend the provision, and pupils are always accompanied by school staff. The headteacher makes unannounced visits to providers to assure the course delivery. Pupils are receiving a bespoke vocational curriculum offer, well matched to their need and interests.

Pupils' behaviour at school is improving. While pupils expressed mixed views about the behaviour at school, they all agreed that there had been fewer physical interventions recently. Leaders ensure that each pupil now has a behaviour risk audit and plan designed to inform targeted support for pupils' behaviour. Previous bullying issues have been dealt with through training and intervention, and there is an overall reduction in bullying incidents. Fixed-term exclusions have also reduced and there have been no permanent exclusions.

The school's evidence shows that governors are receiving limited information about behaviour incidents in the school. There have been over 1,200 incidents recorded from the autumn term to the end of the spring term 2021. Leaders are not analysing any emerging trends, for example in terms of types of incident and frequency. Without this information, governors are not able to challenge leaders' actions to address and reduce different types of behaviour. Physical interventions saw a significant increase in the latter half of the spring term, which leaders attribute to returning to school after lockdown. These interventions are now decreasing. At the moment, leaders use two different systems for the recording of physical interventions. Information about behaviours leading to a physical intervention or post incident reflections with pupils are not captured well enough.

Pupils' attendance at school remains stubbornly low. During the pandemic, leaders worked hard to ensure that pupils attended school, but this attendance has not been sustained. Over one third of pupils are persistently absent. While attendance targets are displayed around the school for pupils to see, they are set at 90% and are not aspirational. While leaders assert that the arrangements for the small number of pupils on part-time timetables are reviewed regularly, they were not able to provide evidence of this.

Additional priorities for improvement

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum content in every subject is clearly mapped and sequenced, enabling pupils to build on and consolidate their knowledge and skills.

Additional support

Leaders are receiving ongoing support from an external school improvement consultant. They appreciate the support they receive in terms of improvement monitoring, recruitment and training for staff and governors. Leaders have also received external support from a teaching school and a behaviour hub. Leaders are now seeking more bespoke support from provisions which cater for pupils with social, emotional and health needs.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents. They met with leaders, subject leaders, groups of staff, the trust director and members of the local governing board and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes.