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16 December 2021

Paul Yeomans
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Dear Mr Yeomans

Special measures monitoring inspection of Springfield House Community Special School

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 November 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 March 2020. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), 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

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 November 2021

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team have been revised. An assistant headteacher has joined the school, having previously been seconded from the multi-academy trust (MAT) that is supporting the school. Four middle leaders have been appointed from within the school. Each works closely with one of the senior leaders. One member of the IEB has resigned and is yet to be replaced. Fewer staff are absent on a long-term basis.

The school's site and premises continue to pose considerable challenges for leaders. For example, maintenance costs are high. No progress has been made in finding an academy sponsor for the school. The local authority (LA) has convened a project board that meets every fortnight. The board comprises the headteacher, members of the IEB and several representatives of LA services, including buildings and infrastructure, health and safety, finance, and human resources. The project board's remit is to consider issues linked to the site and the school's improvement journey.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The school continues to improve in all areas. Policies and procedures that were relatively new at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, for example for behaviour management, are now well established. Safeguarding remains effective. The school has a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Staff remain positive. They are committed to the school's continuing improvement, and morale is good. It is to their credit that issues with the site are not slowing the school's improvement.

There is now greater leadership capacity within the school. Senior leaders have clear roles and responsibilities. The appointment of middle leaders means that leadership responsibilities are shared more widely. Although these appointments are recent, there is already evidence of early positive impact. The school is no longer reliant on external support.

Leaders know what needs to be done. The school development plan is clear and concise. It focuses well on the school's most important priorities. Leaders have implemented changes carefully. They have been mindful of the implications for staff workload and well-being. They have provided thorough training prior to making changes. Consequently, staff feel well prepared before they implement changes and well supported afterwards.

Leaders have demonstrated a track record of improvement to date, for example in safeguarding, behaviour and aspects of the curriculum. This gives confidence that future changes have every chance of being implemented successfully.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, staff have completed comprehensive baseline assessments of all pupils. Leaders have used this information to place pupils in teaching

groups based on their academic ability and individual needs, rather than their age. All classes now comprise pupils from two or more year groups. This action has improved pupils' experience in school considerably. Teachers and teaching assistants now provide work that is much better matched to pupils' abilities than previously. Support in class meets pupils' needs more successfully. Consequently, pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning have improved.

The school's work to improve pupils' reading goes from strength to strength. The phonics scheme was at an early stage of implementation at the previous monitoring inspection. It is now embedded throughout the school. Staff teach phonics confidently. Pupils enjoy their lessons, and many have made rapid progress. Pupils now take home fully decodable books they have been reading in class. Regular assessment enables leaders to provide extra support for pupils who have not mastered content that they have been taught. Leaders are now planning the next steps of the English curriculum for pupils who are becoming more confident readers.

The mathematics curriculum is also improving. It has benefited from the revised grouping of pupils. Teachers now match work well to pupils' abilities and prior knowledge. Teaching is precise. It focuses well on developing pupils' understanding of number by using concrete and then pictorial representations before moving on to more abstract content. Pupils are responding well to their mathematics lessons. They work hard and are increasingly able to talk about what they are learning.

Leaders have recently introduced a new personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. It is delivered through weekly lessons and assemblies. It has been carefully planned and thoughtfully implemented. Pupils are engaging well and are enjoying PSHE education. Although it has only been in place for a few weeks, there are early signs that it is proving successful.

The curriculum beyond English, mathematics and PSHE education remains weak. However, leaders are planning to put in place a revised curriculum for other subjects in January 2022. They have spent a great deal of time researching alternatives and they believe they have found a model that will suit Springfield House's pupils well. Staff spoken to during the inspection were excited about its introduction.

Behaviour continues to improve. Staff manage incidents of inappropriate behaviour calmly and appropriately. Classrooms are usually quiet and orderly. The school makes appropriate use of exclusion, as a last resort. It is not used frequently. Relationships are strong throughout the school. Staff care deeply about pupils and are committed to doing the best for them. Because of the many recent improvements, they also now understand pupils' needs better than they did in the past.

Most pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. The school has clear procedures for parents and carers to follow to report absence. Staff are tenacious in following up non-attendance.

Members of the IEB provide effective support and challenge for leaders. The chair of the IEB visits the school regularly. Other members of the IEB have visited the school, but only once, due to COVID-19 restrictions. The IEB is therefore over-reliant on information passed on to it, rather than seeing the school in operation at first-hand. Members of the IEB intend to be more visible in school in the future.

The school currently has no children in early years. Pupils placed in the school are almost exclusively in key stage 2. Leaders are therefore not investing time or energy in developing the school's early years provision. This approach is appropriate at this time.

Additional support

School leaders value the support being provided by the MAT. They believe the MAT continues to provide good support for the school's continuing improvement.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, pupils, staff and the chief executive officer of the MAT supporting the school. He met with the chair of the IEB and held telephone conversations with two other members of the IEB, and a representative of the LA.

The inspector considered responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire, including written responses. He spoke with one parent. He also considered responses from staff to their online inspection questionnaire.