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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Martyn Cox
Headteacher
Infocus School
Countess Wear
Exeter
Devon
EX2 6HA

Dear Mr Cox

Special measures monitoring inspection of Infocus School

Following my visit to your school on 5 May 2022, 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 December 2019. 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's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Leanne Thirlby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 May 2022

Context

This was the second monitoring visit since the school's section 5 inspection in December 2019. The school appointed an interim headteacher in September 2021. The number of pupils on the school's roll has decreased since the previous monitoring visit. At the time of this inspection, all pupils were being educated at school.

The school has recently experienced COVID-19 issues. As a result, the majority of staff and pupils have had a period of absence. All pupils who attend this school have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The school kept its COVID-19 risk assessment in place until April 2022. This is due to the vulnerable health and medical issues of the pupils. The school is due to close in July 2022.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders, including trustees, are driving effective improvement across the school. You have continued your focus on rapidly tackling the areas for improvement from the previous full inspection.

Safeguarding practice, processes and culture are more embedded. Staff receive the training they need to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. They are clear about the process of 'recognise, report, record', which leaders have implemented to make sure staff remain vigilant and to bring clarity to expectations about safeguarding. There is more robust challenge from the trust, and senior leaders are held to account over the management of pupils' welfare and safety.

Leaders have worked effectively with staff to develop pupils' love of reading. Priority is given to reading within pupils' timetables so that they can experience books in different ways. Pupils read regularly. They have regular opportunities to listen to adults read to them so they encounter a rich and varied vocabulary and knowledge of books. Pupils have opportunities to immerse themselves in stories through drama, objects of reference, sound buttons, audio and tactile books. The sensory approach to reading is supported by working well with therapy staff and also making effective use of external resources. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils read books that increase their awareness of diversity and link reading into their wider curriculum learning.

Leaders have ensured that a consistent phonics programme is in place. The structure of the programme supports adults to know what to teach and when. Reading books contain sounds that pupils know. Leaders are starting to use their increasing expertise to support other staff to teach phonics effectively.

Leaders and staff have designed supporting documents for adults to use in their work with pupils. This ensures that adults know the specific needs of the pupils they are

working with. These include VI passports and behaviour support plans. There are clear links between these documents, academic based targets and each pupil's EHCP.

The work to further embed the curriculum through the newly designed framework is evident. Teachers and other staff use this to assess the small steps in progress made by individual pupils. It is not yet clear how well the curriculum in each of the ten areas of learning is sequenced and how useful the assessment information is to inform future learning. Despite destination profiles being in place, it is also not clear how the small steps of progress inform progress towards important end points in each pupil's learning, such as end of key stage 4 outcomes. Leaders are monitoring the delivery of the curriculum in the school classrooms. However, the impact of this is yet to be seen.

Leaders have developed a rigorous training schedule which covers a wide variety of professional development for school staff. Staff acknowledge the need for this to increase their expertise. Staff recognise the impact this has had on their practice. They say they have the time and support to use this training effectively.

Leaders and staff understand the importance of making sure pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Leaders use a range of strategies and activities to teach pupils about elements of the personal, social and health education, for example being healthy and understanding appropriate touch. This is built into the curriculum framework. However, as with other aspects of the curriculum framework, it is not yet clear how successfully this is sequenced, to ensure that pupils are building on what they already know and how well they remember the learning.

Those responsible for governance are increasing their knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are supportive and challenging in equal measure. They rightly acknowledge that a current priority is the transition of the pupils as the school closes. Leaders, including trustees, and staff are fully aware of the importance of these transitions being successful for the young people currently attending the school. This is being managed with a great deal of care and thought.

Additional support

The education staff and therapy staff within the trust now work together more closely. This has had a positive impact on the offer for the young people in the school class group.

Leaders have engaged well with the range of external support made available to maintain the trajectory of improvement. This has been instrumental in improving safeguarding, the curriculum and the quality of early reading in the school. Leaders have identified where further peer support can be useful through links with another specialist academy.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. The inspector met with the headteacher, head of learning, representatives of the therapy team, the pastoral lead and the chair of trustees.

The school provision is one class group. The inspector spent time in the class talking with pupils and staff. In addition, the inspector met with staff responsible for maintaining the single central record and the designated safeguarding lead.