

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Mrs A Schofield
Acting Executive Principal
Buglawton Hall School
Buxton Road
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Cheshire
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Dear Mrs Schofield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Buglawton Hall School

Following my visit with Michelle Moss, social care inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Broomhead
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Buglawton Hall School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including six lessons or parts of lessons and aspects of the residential provision, scrutinised documents and met with staff and senior managers, including the acting head of centre, the head of care, the deputy head of care, the acting deputy head of centre, and also met the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the acting executive principal of the federation and a group of pupils.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2009 there have been changes to staffing at the school. An interim acting head of centre was appointed in May and has been responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. In addition, following interviews, an internal appointment has been made to the post of acting deputy head of centre. Other appointments have been made to senior positions and these will take effect from September. Other staff changes mean that there is a vacancy for a teacher and two teaching assistant vacancies from September. The new residential building was completed in May and is now in use, providing 16 residential places. The old school building is undergoing refurbishment and is expected to be completed in the autumn, when it will provide 12 residential places. One of the two semi-detached houses on site, as well as the cottage on site, have ceased to be used for residential places. When all the building work is complete the school will have 28 residential places in total. At present there are 28 on roll, 20 of whom are resident. The remainder are either day places or pupils who are being educated at other sites within the federation.

Achievement and standards

Weaknesses in literacy skills continue to be a barrier to achievement. A significant number of pupils have reading and spelling ages which are well below those expected for their age. They are aware of their weaknesses and will ask for help in lessons, for example, with spelling. Also there has been a noticeable improvement in pupils' willingness to write and the care they are taking with their written work.

Standards overall remain variable, but are below average for most pupils. The school has set an appropriate expectation that pupils will improve their attainment in English, mathematics and science by at least two sub-levels per year and analysis of data shows that just over half achieved this level of progress in all three subjects in one term. While some of this good progress may be due to the school having established a more accurate assessment of pupils' starting points, it is clear that this greater focus on tracking small steps of progress, combined with the good quality of

teaching, is leading to improvements in standards. Achievement is strongest in mathematics, science, art and information and communication technology (ICT).

Progress on the area for improvement:

- raise standards and improve achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

There is a generally calm and positive atmosphere around school and pupils' behaviour is usually good. Relationships between pupils and staff are polite and respectful. The pupils say they enjoy their lessons because they are now more interesting and they prefer the new points system which has been introduced to replace the tokens. Their points lead to a choice of evening activities and the opportunity to earn extra spending money. The pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for their own safety. A significant amount of building work is taking place on site and the pupils were seen to behave responsibly, keeping their distance from areas which are out of bounds to them. The attendance patterns of a number of individual pupils have improved significantly in recent months, largely due to the school's extra efforts to work closely with families and carers. However, the attendance of nearly half remains below 80%.

The pupils enjoy the many sports and outdoor education activities in which they take part. During the inspection, a group went off excitedly on their annual summer camp for a few days. The pupils continue to learn about other cultures and ways of life through art, theme days, and sharing foods from different countries. They explore some interesting issues, such as the different backgrounds and nationalities of players in well known football teams. The school now has a more informed picture of pupils' individual heritages, but has yet to consider how these individual differences can be incorporated into planning for future provision. The school is aware that provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development should be extended further.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- ensure opportunities are provided for pupils to understand and appreciate the values and cultures of its diverse population – satisfactory

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is variable, but mainly good and this is beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and respect and willingly accept help from adults. In the better lessons, the pupils are interested and engaged throughout. Questions are probing and help pupils to develop their line of thinking in a logical manner, which promotes deeper levels of understanding. The pupils ask as well as answer questions, reflecting their

increasingly enquiring minds. ICT is used well to support both teaching and learning. These lessons start promptly, progress at a good pace, and end with plenary sessions which help pupils to reflect on what they have learned and understood.

Teachers' planning identifies learning objectives for lessons and units of work. However, there is insufficient detail and clarity to guide the work of classroom support staff, who do not have the opportunity to be involved in planning lessons with teachers and are not trained in supporting pupils' learning. Some planning also lacks information about the pupils' individual abilities and the corresponding expectations of their learning tasks and outcomes. As a result, the potential for care staff to support learning as well as they support behaviour is untapped.

Assessment has improved and is becoming more specific and reliable due to work with partner schools. The school is now able to track small steps of progress in English, mathematics, science and ICT. A closer analysis of literacy and numeracy skills has provided more accurate and up-to-date data on individual pupils' needs and teachers are beginning to consider these when planning lessons. A new marking scheme has recently been introduced, which gives a grade for effort and one for attainment. However, some of the comments in pupils' books are too vague and focussed on behaviour at the expense of learning, thus limiting their value in helping pupils to know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve further. The pupils are not yet fully involved in setting and reviewing their targets for learning.

The curriculum places a strong focus on outdoor education and sports, as well as personal, social, health and citizenship education. Both of these aspects are delivered well across the school and in the residential settings and contribute significantly to pupils' physical, social and emotional well-being. However, the link between school and residence, in other areas of the curriculum, is underdeveloped. Religious education is taught on an occasional basis and planning for this provision is minimal. French is taught to some pupils in Key Stage 3 and pupils are enjoying these lessons. The school has been extending the range of qualifications available at Key Stage 4, but this has been in the absence of an overarching curriculum policy and development plan. As a result, the rationale for such change is not made clear and appears ad hoc.

Progress on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning – satisfactory

Care, guidance and support and boarding provision

Steady progress is being made in securing the physical, personal and emotional needs of pupils. This includes increased staff morale and confidence. The care staff team are receiving increased support and guidance through more frequent supervision and training opportunities are enhancing their roles and responsibilities.

However, safeguarding training is not increasing the staff's knowledge of the roles of Local Children's Safeguarding Boards and the referral process. This hinders their familiarity with procedures and the roles of safeguarding teams. Safer recruitment practices are being applied within the school. This is helping to ensure more suitable vetting is secured.

Reasonable measures are being taken to reduce the risk of physical and emotional harm to pupils. Increased monitoring of the welfare of pupils is starting to drive forward the school's self-improvement, although some aspects are not yet rigorous enough to show how patterns or issues are identified and the action taken to bring about improvement. The school is starting to look at the recorded physical intervention incidents and evaluating patterns and trends. Also, recording books are being maintained for all physical restraints and sanctions. However, pupils' individual behaviour plans remain limited in their detail and physical interventions continue to be a main method of care and control.

The care staff have access to more informed health and care plans. These plans are starting to define how a pupil is to be looked after on a day-to-day basis, but do not extend to being child-centred and securing participation. This limits pupils being empowered to plan their current and future care needs. Also, information about pupils' culture, identity and health needs is incomplete. This prevents care staff having all the knowledge they need to promote the health and well-being of pupils.

Pupils are aware of the benefits of healthy eating and regular exercise. Menus demonstrate that a varied diet is offered. There have been improvements in arrangements for overseeing the health needs of pupils, including the use of more effective procedures for the administration and storage of medicines.

The move to the new residential unit is providing boarding pupils with a higher standard of accommodation and facilities to meet their needs. However, the use of surveillance cameras in all corridors has not been subject to impact assessment to determine what effect this type of equipment has on the rights and privacy of pupils.

The number of care staff continues to be a cause for concern. Risk assessments for staffing levels are not sufficiently detailed to reflect the needs of pupils, taking into consideration the layout of the school and how this impacts on lone working. Also, there is insufficient fire safety within the school's residential units to provide adequate protection for the welfare of pupils and staff.

The improvements achieved so far are helping to bring more stability into the care provision and to increase the efficiency of school. Pupils are starting to flourish through their learning and care. However, there are still a number of key areas of care that require improvement. The school still has six unmet national minimum standards from previous visits and two new areas of improvement identified from this visit.

Progress on the area for improvement:

- improve the care provided to ensure the health, safety and well-being of pupils and staff, and ensure the school meets all the boarding national minimum standards which were unmet at the time of the inspection in October 2008 – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The main focus since the last monitoring visit has been addressing the serious weaknesses which existed in the provision for pupils' care. As a result, provision has improved, there are clearer lines of accountability and staff morale is high. Across the school there is an acceptance of higher expectations, a shared understanding of the priorities for improvement, and a sense of the pace needed to achieve these. Some appointments have been made to senior posts, mostly effective from September and these are welcome steps forward. However, the school will be starting the autumn term with a significant number of senior figures in acting or temporary posts, therefore, the school will continue to require substantial support from the local authority to maintain its recent stability.

The school has also focused its attention on improving attendance through the appointment of a coordinator who has tightened up recording procedures and instigated closer links with parents and carers. Although average attendance has fallen to 65%, this masks the very real improvements in individual pupils' attendance over recent months. A small, but significant, number of non-attenders continue to bring down the average for the year; when their data is not included, the average is nearer to 80%. However, attendance remains a priority for improvement.

Managers are beginning to analyse other aspects of provision, for example, the trends in the use of physical restraint. They also continue to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and have an accurate view of the school's good practice and points for improvement. However, the school's policy on the appointment, training and deployment of classroom support staff has not been finalised. A significant improvement has been in the use of attainment data to help teachers to track pupils' progress, identify underachievement and begin to be more specific about next steps in learning.

An outline school improvement plan has been drawn up which begins to set out the school's strategic direction. The school recognises that further detail is needed to make it into a working document, which identifies priorities and sets out how and when these will be addressed, including how expertise and capacity will be developed.

Progress on the area for improvement:

- secure the leadership and management of the school – satisfactory

External support

The local authority and IEB continue to provide good, effective support to the school and contribute significantly to its current stability. Additional support has been provided by advisers from the National Strategies team and the Greater Manchester Challenge. Strong links have been promoted with partner schools and these have enabled staff to draw on the good practice seen elsewhere. Senior appointments have been made to bring additional expertise to the team and a longer term view of the school's role and provision is being developed. An in-depth audit of care was commissioned by the IEB to provide a detailed baseline of improvements needed, and on-going monitoring is taking place in line with standard 33 of national minimum standards. The provision is kept under review by the regular meetings of the IEB, visits by the local authority school effectiveness officer and involvement of the school improvement partner. In recognition of the acting or temporary nature of some senior posts from September, the local authority has agreed a programme of mentoring and supervision whilst staff become established in their new roles.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance.
- Improve teachers' planning so that it is a helpful tool to guide the work of all adults involved in pupils' learning.
- Continue to address remaining failings against national minimum standards.
- Adopt a strategic approach to developing the curriculum which sets out the entitlement for the pupils at this school and the means by which this will be achieved.