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Dear Dr Madhlangobe

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Pinetree School

Following my visit to your school on 7 June 2016, 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.

This was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all 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's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all of the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2015.

- Urgently improve the safeguarding of all pupils by ensuring that:
 - all the safer recruitment checks required by law are completed and recorded on the school's single central record
 - the school site is safe and that all health and safety requirements are met
 - the use of locked doors as a behaviour management tool is reviewed, and staff develop pupils' ability to manage their own behaviour around the school site
 - procedures to tackle persistent absence are used robustly so that attendance increases
 - risk assessment procedures relating to off-site trips and visits are in place.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors by ensuring that:
 - all aspects of the school's work are evaluated thoroughly, that detailed improvement plans are put in place, and that leaders and governors monitor their implementation thoroughly
 - all statutory policies and procedures are in place, up-to-date and reflected in day-to-day practice
 - pupils' emotional and health needs, together with the extent of their prior knowledge, understanding and skills, are assessed carefully when they join the school and that this information is used to plan their learning
 - systematic checks on the behaviour and progress of pupils undertaking off-site alternative provision take place
 - the quality of teaching, and the suitability and accuracy of assessment, are monitored carefully so that this information is used to assess the impact of teaching on pupils' progress
 - systems are put in place that manage the performance of staff, and ensure their appropriate professional development
 - all leaders have the knowledge and skills they need to drive improvement within their areas of responsibility, drawing further upon the resources of the Trust in order to build leadership capacity.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that teachers in all subjects:
 - have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and respond effectively to instances of disruption
 - encourage high expectations by putting in place aspirational targets for pupils that are appropriate to their starting points

- establish the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding caused by previous weaknesses in teaching, and provide appropriate support in order to fill them
- use their understanding of what pupils know and can do to plan engaging activities that are suitably challenging, so that pupils can take the next steps in their learning
- provide regular and precise subject-specific feedback that makes clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work, and ensure that they make the necessary changes
- help those pupils with low levels of literacy so that they can read and write well
- observe the good practice that exists within the school, particularly in mathematics and in science, and benefit from high quality training.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 June 2016

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and other senior leaders, the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive of the Engage Trust.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, three new staff have been appointed. The interim executive board has transferred responsibility for governance to a local governing body.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Improvements to the school are being undermined by significant weaknesses in the management of pupils' behaviour, which is often disruptive and at times unacceptable. The unwillingness of some of your most challenging pupils to respond positively to staff, adhere to school rules and apply themselves to their learning is evident in classrooms and in corridors. It is also reflected in the poor quality of work in pupils' books. Sanctions for the most challenging and offensive behaviour are unclear. Without further prompt action to secure better behaviour it is unlikely that the school will be ready for the removal of special measures in 2017.

Establishing clearer procedures for securing pupils' good behaviour remains the school's top priority. Bearing in mind the challenging backgrounds of pupils, most of whom have already been excluded from mainstream schools and have gaps in their education, this presents a significant challenge. You and the trust acknowledge that without this, improvements made to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment will have little impact.

Safeguarding remains secure. The checking and recording of information about the backgrounds of newly appointed staff are robust and health and safety arrangements on the school site meet requirements. Overall attendance rates are rising but remain below average.

You continue to forge relations with pupils and provide your staff with clear, committed leadership to bring about improvement. Expectations of staff are higher. Your leadership is enabling them to grow in confidence and competence, and increase their effectiveness. For example, findings from your regular learning walks are shared with staff to highlight their strengths and weaknesses, and identify what they need to develop further.

Your school's information shows that overall attendance is now significantly higher than it was at this stage of the year in 2015. The attendance of a small minority of pupils remains stubbornly low. You are beginning to take further 'fast-track' action to challenge the parents of these pupils to get them back into school.

The local governing body has met twice since the last monitoring inspection. Minutes of meetings show that governors are providing further support and challenge for you. They have overseen a range of revised procedures to maintain the day-to-day operational management of the school and secure its long-term sustainability. They feel that you are providing them with accurate information so that they are able to gauge how effectively areas for improvement identified in the school's development plans are being dealt with.

A broader, three-year action plan to secure further improvement from September 2016 has been drafted and shared with governors. Weekly meetings between you and the trust's chief executive enable you to report upon, and evaluate, the school's development.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are further signs of improved teaching due to your regular monitoring and feedback to staff, and weekly training and planning sessions. However, observations carried out jointly with you found that the teachers' planning and preparation are too easily ruined by a small minority of pupils. These pupils refuse to engage in learning, or decide to disrupt the learning of others. At times, swearing and shouting interrupts teaching. Valuable time is wasted dealing with the consequences of this poor behaviour. Too many pupils leave lessons without permission and wander the school or outside areas.

Some of the improvements noted in the last monitoring inspection have been developed further. For example, in English and mathematics planning is tailored much more closely to the abilities of pupils, as identified in their initial assessments. Plans also include suitable strategies to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. Some teachers are becoming adept at providing short, enjoyable tasks which help to reinforce pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills. These tasks also capture pupils' interest at the start of lessons, which encourages them to settle quickly and focus on their learning. Other staff fail to do this because their lesson introductions are too long or uninteresting. This leads to some pupils losing concentration, disrupting lessons, or quietly disengaging from learning.

Teaching assistants are usually deployed effectively to work alongside pupils outside of lessons to improve their basic literacy skills, and prepare them for entry-level tests. They are under-used in lessons because their role is supervisory, rather than to provide help and support to enable pupils to learn effectively.

Your scrutiny of pupils' work confirms some of the weaknesses raised during the last monitoring inspection. Teachers' marking continues to comment favourably on work even when it is incomplete, untidy or there is simply not enough of it. Some work is graded overgenerously; for example, in mathematics pupils are told their work is 'level 5 or 6' when only very basic numbers are used to calculate and solve problems. In most subjects, pupils with low levels of literacy are not required to write regularly, or at length.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Despite the sustained efforts of staff, a small minority of pupils choose to regularly leave lessons. When they do this, support assistants ensure that they remain safe on the school site, showing remarkable patience and tolerance when faced with bad language or non-compliance from pupils. These pupils show little regard for the school rules, or the expectations staff have of them.

Daily 'meet and greet' sessions by staff, and assemblies led by you continue to set the tone for the day. This helps pupils to feel welcome and cared for, and gives opportunities for staff to spot any personal issues that may be affecting pupils. Teachers strive hard to build good relations with pupils. This has a positive impact on most of them, but a few arrive at lessons not willing to listen to staff, choosing to lounge about on desks or the floor rather than getting on with their work. Some staff avoid further confrontation by setting tasks that are often far too easy for pupils, and have to negotiate at length with them to encourage them to engage in learning. Often, pupils rather than teachers determine how much work they will do in lessons.

The newly introduced system to reward good behaviour and positive attitudes is encouraging some pupils to accrue credits to attend off-site activities. This is not yet firmly established. A small minority of pupils do not recognise the value of credits and do not respond positively to them.

Outcomes for pupils

You have ensured that this year, all Year 11 pupils are entered for a range of GCSE examinations and other tests and awards matched to their abilities. Senior staff have already made arrangements with a range of local providers so that pupils can continue their education and training next September.

Your current assessment information indicates that pupils at both key stages 3 and 4 are making at least expected progress in English, mathematics and science. This information has been shared with governors but has not been analysed rigorously enough to see whether it matches the actual progress seen in lessons and in the quality of work in pupils' books.

My scrutiny of the work of a small minority of some of your most challenging pupils showed that they regularly refuse to start work or disengage from learning, leaving

work unfinished. As a result, the volume of work is minimal and of poor quality. These pupils are not making sufficient progress.

External support

You continue to work effectively with an adviser from the Department for Education to monitor the school's improvement. The trust recently commissioned a review of the school's work, carried out by two other school leaders. They accurately identified many of its strengths and weaknesses. However, the findings of this recent review have not been used fully to inform further training and staff development.