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Mr D Blaylock and Mr N Sykes
Interim Headteacher and Interim Associate Headteacher
Arbour Vale School
Farnham Road
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Dear Mr Blaylock and Mr Sykes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Arbour Vale School

Following my visit with Hilary Goddard, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 July 2018, 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 June 2017. 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Prince
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2017.

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
 - leaders and relevant staff fully understand safeguarding requirements and ensure that statutory processes are in place
 - appropriate employment checks are in place for everyone who works in the school, including temporary staff
 - safer recruitment processes are observed
 - all staff receive appropriate training and have oversight and understanding of the school's safeguarding policy
 - leaders retain sharp oversight of which alternative providers pupils attend
 - record-keeping, particularly that relating to child protection processes, is rigorous
 - fire regulations are met.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management and governance by making sure that:
 - a sustainable leadership and teaching structure is in place
 - all stakeholders are fully engaged in school improvement and their views fully considered
 - staff performance is regularly monitored and reviewed, and staff are held firmly to account
 - staff training needs are acted upon in a timely manner
 - school policies are kept under regular review and shared with staff
 - school performance information is accurate, analysed regularly and used to inform school improvement planning more sharply
 - the school's finances are kept under watchful review and evaluated for value for money
 - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils, including those in the early years and 16 to 19 provision and those who are disadvantaged, make good progress in all aspects of learning by:
 - developing the skills and expertise of staff, particularly with regard to supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ensuring that pupils have access to and benefit from required specialist therapies, including speech and language

- ensuring that pupils' individual learning plans are suitably challenging and build sufficiently well on prior learning
- making sure that transition times between activities are prompt and learning time is maximised.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 July 2018 to 5 July 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents and policies, including: leaders' evaluations of progress of the school's improvement, governors' minutes, records relating to staff recruitment and training and pupils' safety, and local authority monitoring reports. Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the interim headteacher, interim associate headteacher, the designated lead for safeguarding and the leader responsible for disadvantaged pupils. Inspectors also met with a governor responsible for safeguarding and a group of staff, and individually with some therapists. Inspectors met separately with groups of secondary pupils, sixth-form students and parents. Inspectors met with representatives from the local authority and from the proposed academy sponsor. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of governors on the telephone. Together with senior leaders, inspectors made short visits to classrooms to look at pupils' learning, and discussed the assessment of pupils' progress and improvements being made to managing staff performance. Small samples of pupils' work were also reviewed as part of a discussion with leaders about the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the interim associate headteacher has been appointed to the substantive post of principal/headteacher and will formally take up this position from 1 September 2018. The interim headteacher has been appointed to the role of associate principal/headteacher and will continue to support the leadership of the school on a part-time basis next term. Leaders have continued to reduce the number of agency staff employed. The leadership structure was extended in April 2018, to include a range of additional middle leaders, for example. A speech and language therapist joined the staff in September 2017. The residential provision remains closed and there are no plans to reopen this. The residential site is now used by pupils and students when working on life-skills programmes.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Together, you both continue to provide strong and effective leadership, supported well by the capable wider leadership team. The effective partnership between school leaders, the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT) and the local authority, commended at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, continues to flourish. You successfully promote a positive atmosphere throughout the school, supporting continuing improvement, and your leadership is valued by staff and parents alike. Staff explained to inspectors that senior leaders are now visible around the school and easily accessible to them.

Improvements in safeguarding arrangements highlighted at the previous monitoring

inspection have been reliably maintained. Staff now fully understand the school's safeguarding policy and their role in keeping pupils safe. Staff confidently explained to inspectors that 'safeguarding is at the forefront of everyone's mind'. Timely referrals are made to outside agencies when appropriate. Actions recommended by the recent fire risk assessment have been successfully completed. The school's recruitment records are compliant and well maintained. All statutory checks to ensure adults' suitability to work with children are rigorously undertaken.

At the time of the previous monitoring visit governors did not hold leaders to account well enough because they did not check for themselves what leaders told them. Governors are now improving their ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the school by ensuring that they gather first-hand information. For example, a governor with safeguarding expertise has recently been identified to take responsibility for safeguarding. Regular visits to the school by governors have begun to take place.

Senior leaders ensure that staff receive helpful training and individual support. A comprehensive programme of professional development is being developed, which staff value. This covers school policy developments, together with training designed to improve staff knowledge and skills. The positive impact of this can be seen in the growing strengths of middle leadership. Newly appointed middle leaders are being skilfully supported to monitor teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility and to lead improvements. Although this aspect of their work is in the early stages of development, middle leaders are now beginning to influence the quality of teaching, for example by carrying out observations of teaching and learning, identifying areas for improvement and starting to offer relevant support to colleagues.

Helpfully, school policies are now kept under regular review, with updates shared efficiently with staff. The success of this is evident in the high level of consistency, both in the approach to safeguarding, and in the management of pupils' behaviour across the school. Staff are secure in the school's approaches and know exactly what is expected of them. As a result, classrooms in all phases of the school are calm, and routines are well established. Governors are rightly keen to strengthen their work in this area by monitoring the effectiveness of school policies on a more regular basis.

All the recommendations arising from a recent external review of the school's website have been successfully implemented. As a result, the required information is readily available on the site. Parents also commented on the wider improvements they have seen in communication with them throughout this year. Consequently, they feel well informed about school life through the website, letters and text-message updates.

Leaders and governors are now keeping a more watchful eye on the school's finances. A reduction in the proportion of staff employed through agencies is bringing financial benefits as well as greater consistency in the support that pupils

experience.

Leaders' effective communication with staff ensures that all colleagues understand the priorities for improvement and their role in successfully completing the required developments. This motivates staff to contribute well through their own ideas and effort. For example, staff are rightly proud of the contribution they made to improve the procedures at the start and end of the school day. Consequently, staff fully understand the school's priorities and their role in school improvement.

Leaders have made a promising start to establishing appropriate performance management arrangements for staff. A comprehensive appraisal policy is now in place and a programme of evaluative lesson observations is underway. Staff commented to inspectors on the impact that performance management is starting to have on the training programme and subsequently on their work.

The new leader responsible for promoting the progress of pupils entitled to pupil premium support has made a positive start to the role. Work has begun on improving the identification of disadvantaged pupils' individual needs and to understand more accurately the support that these pupils need to help them to learn well. However, the external review of the pupil premium grant, recommended at the previous inspection, has not yet been completed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Due to the previous weaknesses in teachers' assessment of pupils' learning, leaders do not yet have reliable information to enable them to evaluate, over time, pupils' progress across the school. Appropriate work has begun, particularly evident in the early years, to trial a promising new system of assessment. As a result of this work, there is evidence of some staff beginning to use more precise information about children's learning to improve their teaching and accelerate pupils' progress. This work still needs considerable development across the school, including to inform and improve leaders' evaluation of the school's development and their forward planning.

Staff are beginning to develop teaching in line with the advice, support and guidance being provided. Some improvement is resulting but this is not yet reliably secured throughout the school. In particular, teaching is not yet consistently tailored well to meet pupils' individual, and often complex, learning needs.

Encouraging developments have been made with a local business to create supported employment opportunities for sixth-form students when they leave the school. As a result, this year a small group of students will join a supported internship programme.

Pupils now have better access to specialist therapies, in particular speech and language therapy. The therapist has provided helpful training to a team of staff who

now deliver increasingly effective speech and language support to pupils across the school. Parents are highly appreciative of the speech and language support their children now receive. They also value the fact that the therapist is readily accessible to them should they have any questions. Parents also welcome the sessions that the therapist offers to help them understand more about how to support their children's communication at home. Furthermore, physiotherapists and occupational therapists also work increasingly closely with teaching staff, resulting in helpfully collaborative approaches to promoting pupils' progress.

External support

Advisers from OHCAT and the local authority have provided helpful support to the school since the previous inspection. An example of the impact of this work can be seen in the positive developments made in the assessment of children's learning in the early years. OHCAT has also provided relevant training and individual support to enhance staff expertise. Senior leaders, OHCAT and the local authority continue to work effectively together to progress the conversion of the school to an academy.