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Mr Don Blaylock
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mr Blaylock

Special measures monitoring inspection of Arbour Vale School

Following my visit to your school on 15 March 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2017.

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

Matthew Barnes
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 more 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 first monitoring inspection on 15 March 2018

Evidence

During this inspection I met with you, other leaders, including the interim associate headteacher and designated lead for safeguarding, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the proposed sponsor for the school when it converts to an academy. I spoke to the chair of the governing body on the telephone. We completed short visits to classrooms together, during which I discussed with leaders how teaching and learning is monitored, how pupils' progress is assessed and improvements made to leaders' processes for managing performance. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including plans for improvement, minutes of the governing body meetings, leaders' evaluations of progress, amended policies, and reports provided by external consultants. Due to the significance of safeguarding concerns at the time of the previous inspection, I focused the vast majority of my time looking at how safeguarding arrangements and the quality of leadership and management have been improved.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the former acting headteacher has returned to her substantive post as deputy headteacher. A new interim headteacher has been appointed, supported by an interim associate headteacher. There have been a number of changes in the governing body, including a new chair of governors. Leaders have successfully reduced the number of agency staff filling posts. The residential provision no longer houses boarders. Instead, leaders have introduced new initiatives to use the residential block to help prepare students for adulthood.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You, ably supported by the interim associate headteacher and other leaders, have built very successfully on the foundations laid by previous interim leadership. As a result, swift, decisive and effective action has been taken to tackle the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection report. Of particular note is the effective partnership working between you, other leaders, the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT) and the local authority to bring about rapid improvement, especially in the renewed positive culture at the school.

Pupils are now safe. Safeguarding arrangements are much more effective. You, your senior leadership team, governors, those providing external support and staff have all played a critical role in turning around the school's approach to keeping pupils safe. All leaders have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what is expected to create a robust safeguarding culture. Consequently, they have rightly prioritised safeguarding policy and practice, while providing useful and well-targeted training for staff. As a result, all those who work at the school recognise and willingly step up to take responsibility for pupils' safety. For example, the handover

when children arrive at the school in the morning has been reorganised and is now much safer. Children are properly accounted for when they arrive. Similarly, the processes for staff and visitors to sign in have been appropriately improved. Different coloured lanyards are now used effectively to ensure that only people who have the appropriate checks can have unsupervised access to pupils.

The new safeguarding policy is underpinned by clear processes for staff to follow. There is a new and effective safeguarding team whose members have absolute clarity about their roles and what they expect of others. Leaders have introduced a much more effective system for staff to record any concerns they may have for children. The system is used consistently and diligently by staff. There are stronger lines of communication between school staff and other agencies. Consequently, the quality and rigour of record-keeping is now a strength.

You and other leaders, as well as the governing body, have taken effective action to address weaknesses in safer recruitment practice. Employment checks are rigorous and comprehensive. All statutory checks on the suitability of staff are undertaken and recorded on the single central register. For new staff, appropriate reference requests include direct questions to previous employers about the suitability of candidates to work with children.

Historical issues of leaders' oversight of pupils when they are not learning on the school site have also been addressed. There are precise systems for staff to follow when planning off-site activities, for learning in the local college and for when pupils access work experience. Staff are aware of these and follow them precisely. The improved systems and routes of communication among staff ensure that leaders are fully aware of where children are, what they are doing, and how to check on their whereabouts if needed.

Since the school was found to require special measures, the local authority and governing body have wasted no time in identifying an appropriate preferred sponsor for the school as it converts to an academy. Together, they have ensured that appropriate arrangements for leadership have led to rapid improvements. For example, in securing your services and that of the interim associate headteacher, strong progress has been made in improving leadership capacity among current substantive leaders at the school. For example, you have prioritised investing time, energy and bespoke professional development for key senior leaders. The investment has worked well. There is renewed vitality in the work of leaders. Better lines of accountability and responsibility have helped staff be clearer about what to do, when, and for whom. Consequently, the staff team's morale has improved significantly. The school community is working towards a common purpose to improve provision and do what is right for the children in its care.

Governors' effectiveness is improving, but not at a fast enough rate. Although

governance has been strengthened by new appointments, many of these are recent and mean that the members of the governing body as a whole still rely heavily on what they have reported to them in meetings. Governors receive useful information about the progress the school is making. They have taken decisive and brave decisions in the appointment of the new headteacher, for example not rushing in to recruit a headteacher who would not be right to take the school forwards. However, they have not established regular and focused visits to check for themselves what they are told by leaders or external consultants. Therefore, they are not certain that the information reported is reflected in direct, first-hand evidence when visiting the school.

At the time of the monitoring inspection, no external review of the use of the pupil premium grant had been completed. You rightly recognise that this needs addressing with urgency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

You and the leadership team have rightly prioritised tackling weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements and establishing leadership and management at the school. Together, you have successfully changed the culture and motivation of staff. However, you correctly recognise that there is still much work to do to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

You have introduced more rigorous approaches to monitor the effectiveness of the school and managing staff performance. For example, you have introduced formal lesson observations to help leaders evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have worked well with staff to implement this change in approach with as little stress as possible. Your plans to develop better use of informal observations are well conceived and sensible given the range of improvements that you have already identified are needed across the school.

Weaknesses in the use of assessment have limited how well you can judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. Despite already introducing a single approach to assessment, there remains too little information to show meaningful progress for pupils from their starting points. This means that leaders are having to rely too heavily on observations to analyse strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning over time. You rightly recognise that this needs improving rapidly.

External support

You and other leaders have made excellent use of any external support provided by the local authority and by OHCAT. Strong progress has been made in the plans to convert the school to an academy. Improvements to the quality of safeguarding arrangements have included appropriate challenge and support from external advisers. The impact of current interim leaders also reflects the strength of the

external support that has been provided to the school.