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Mrs Victoria Rashleigh
Headteacher
Sherborne Learning Centre
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Dear Mrs Rashleigh

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sherborne Learning Centre

Following my visit with Julie Nash, Ofsted Inspector to your centre on 3 May 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 centre's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the centre became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The centre's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The centre may not 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 Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, improve the effectiveness of the centre's safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that:
 - there are clear roles and responsibilities for safeguarding
 - safeguarding policies are up to date and all staff are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe
 - staff, including those who lead safeguarding in the centre, have appropriate training and guidance so that they are able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively
 - there is a review of the site used for key stage 3 pupils and appropriate risk assessments are put in place in order to improve the health and safety of this provision.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and governance by making sure that:
 - leaders at all levels receive the support and guidance they need in order to tackle the significant weaknesses in the centre
 - improvement plans are focused on the key priorities, have clear milestones and are rigorously reviewed and updated
 - the management committee closely checks the achievement of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special education needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
 - leaders use assessment information to identify weaknesses in achievement and rapidly make any changes needed in order for pupils' achievement to improve
 - the new performance management system is embedded and is used to drive improvement in teaching, accelerate pupils' progress and hold teachers and leaders rigorously to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in order to accelerate the progress pupils make by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information to plan learning activities that closely match pupils' learning needs
 - pupils' learning plans identify their precise next steps and the strategies needed to achieve success.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the centre'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 3 May 2018

Evidence

Meetings were held with the pupils, headteacher, other school leaders, staff, a director of the 'Reach' alternative provision (a youth service approved by Somerset local authority), the chair of the interim executive board and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were held with two taxi drivers. The inspectors spoke on the telephone to the national leader of education who is working with the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work on the main site and visited the sports facility off-site to observe pupils engaged in physical activity. They scrutinised documents, including those for the Reach alternative provision.

Context

Sherborne Learning Centre is a pupil referral unit. Pupils come from a wide geographical area and most come to the centre by taxi. The majority of pupils attend the centre because they either have been excluded or are at risk of being permanently excluded from their mainstream school. A significant proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Pupils in key stage 3 previously attended an off-site provision which is no longer being used, due to health and safety concerns. The centre uses a local indoor sports area for physical education lessons. The centre also uses alternative provision on a working farm called Rylands Farm and Reach.

The current interim headteacher took up post in May 2017. The interim deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2017. Leaders receive support from the Dorset Association of Learning Centre Headteachers (DALCH), a school education partner provided by the local authority and from a national leader of education.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The effectiveness of the centre's safeguarding arrangements has improved. However, leaders are aware that more diligence is required in the way some records are coordinated and maintained in relation to attendance and pupils' behaviour.

There are clear roles and responsibilities for safeguarding. Staff are kept up to date with appropriate training and guidance to be able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities appropriately. Staff understand the implications related to specific safeguarding concerns and know what action to take. The single central record has been updated and is now compliant with government requirements.

The centre's review of the site for key stage 3 pupils and subsequent risk assessment found it not to be fit for purpose. As a result, the centre no longer uses the site. Leaders have been seeking an alternative venue, to no avail. The impact of this is that some pupils cannot be accommodated on the current centre site and cannot be provided with a full-time timetable. This will only be resolved if the centre has access to another suitable site, or when current Year 11 pupils leave for their study leave.

The named safeguarding lead on the interim executive board has been appointed and trained appropriately. Some members of the interim executive board are still waiting for their training. However, they, along with senior leaders, have a good understanding of local safeguarding concerns. They are aware of their duties under 'Prevent', and how to support and protect children and young people from exploitation.

There is currently no designated special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) at the centre. The specific needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are being considered. However, the centre needs to have a fully trained SENCo to ensure that the specific needs of pupils are identified well enough, particularly those who have medical needs or disadvantages that might be masking their SEN needs.

The interim headteacher has ensured that the centre's improvement plan is fit for purpose. It is pithy and pertinent. The actions indicated are well thought through and timely. Timescales are clear and the areas for improvement, as noted in the previous inspection report, are being doggedly and determinedly tackled.

The interim headteacher and the interim deputy headteacher have an accurate understanding of where the centre is, and how it can be improved. They are now getting the help and support that they need. As a result, the centre's monitoring and analysis of pupils' progress and the standards that they reach have significantly improved. However, closer attention needs to be given to ensure that information is recorded with accuracy and consistency, particularly around pupils' attendance and behaviour.

All staff participate in a clear performance review process. Their targets are set in line with the whole-centre improvement plan and the previous Ofsted inspection report. The half-year review is currently being undertaken.

Middle leadership is being steadily developed. For example, the behaviour leader is tracking pupils' behaviour patterns and subject leaders are holding staff, and each other, more to account. However, they are struggling with the amount and type of information that they are gathering. The centre leaders and those responsible for governance are aware that the information about pupils needs to be combined and suitably cross-referenced to better inform staff about pupils' areas of strength and improvement.

The review of the management committee did not take place. Instead, it was decided to replace it with an interim executive board. This had been planned to take place in January 2018. This was delayed until April 2018. They have had one full meeting the week prior to this inspection. They are experienced and have a clear understanding as to what support and challenge the leaders of the centre need. They are starting to review all of the policies and procedures to ensure that they are pertinent and tailored specifically to the centre.

The external review of the centre's use of the pupil premium funding was undertaken in March 2018. It would have been helpful for senior leaders to have had this sooner. Nevertheless, it is a comprehensive document that provides the senior leaders with a clear steer forward through the analysis and recommendations as well as recognising the significant changes that are already under way.

The centre leaders have met with a representative of the regional schools commissioner. An appointed sponsor for the purpose of academisation has yet to be agreed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Some teaching is well planned and personalised to individual pupil need and ability. However, this is not consistent. It is best where teachers, and other adults, use open, targeted questions that extend pupils' learning. The expectations of some teachers are still not high enough, particularly in relation to the way pupils are expected to respond to the feedback they receive from staff. For example, it is expected by senior leaders that part of tutor time will be used for 'Directed Improvement and Reflection Time' (DIRT). This is where pupils are given the time to learn from the feedback provided by their subject teachers and then respond to them. It is intended that this time should be for all subjects. However, the time is used more by personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and English staff. As a result, pupils' progress and standards in these subjects are improving at a better rate than for others.

The new assessment system has been established. The centre now tracks all pupils' achievements in all subjects. Teachers are using the new policy to help them record what pupils know, understand and can do. Pupils' learning plans are now personalised learning plans and the expected outcomes clearly identified.

Almost all staff have received good-quality training. This has helped them to improve the way they are teaching, enabling pupils to learn more efficiently and deeply. Some staff have not yet completed the training they need because they were not previously available. More training, of the same quality, is planned. For example, mainstream feeder schools are supporting teaching and learning effectively by helping staff with their professional development across the centre. Although staff have been willing to adapt and change their ways of working, most of the changes are still very new and are not fully embedded across the centre.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils who regularly attend the centre develop improved learning habits. When they attend the centre they are kept safe and are well cared for by staff. Strong relationships exist between pupils, each other and with staff. The professional relationships and support from staff help pupils to learn to persevere and 'have a go', even when they are initially reluctant to take part in activities.

There are very few serious incidents and the use of physical intervention of pupils is seldom required. Tutor time has now been established and is used to support pupils' learning, mental health and well-being.

The centre's systems to use rewards and consequences are now clear, understood and followed by pupils and staff. Ensuring that mobile phones are not used to distract learning in lessons is now being firmly applied. Nevertheless, all behaviour systems are relatively new. They do not yet link sufficiently well with other centre records to provide leaders and those responsible for governance with a comprehensive overview of individuals or for different pupil groups.

Pupils' attendance is not improving as rapidly as it needs to in order to ensure that pupils get the full-time, good-quality, rounded education to which they are entitled. Some pupils never attend the centre, or their dual placement school. Others are not attending any provision for a large proportion of the week. Although the centre increases the amount of time that pupils are required to attend, more needs to be done in conjunction with the schools where pupils have dual placements to ensure that all pupils attend the centre, or their school, as often as they can.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' books and the work around the centre show that pupils are taking greater pride in their work. They are doing better now, particularly in reading and writing. Pupils who are on part-time timetables, or who do not attend as often as they can, do not do as well as others.

The centre is aware that more needs to be done to provide a wider range of courses. Leaders are investigating providing vocational courses at a local college from September 2018. They are also aware that more needs to be done to provide pupils with work-based learning, such as through supported internships and apprenticeships.

Careers advice is helping pupils to remain in education, training or gain employment when they leave Year 11. However, although aspirations are improving, centre leaders are aware that more pupils are capable of going on to higher education courses than currently do so.

External support

The local authority took too long to appoint an interim executive board. It did not stick to the timings in its own action plan. This has hampered the impact of specialist strategic support needed to speedily drive improvements. In addition, the local authority has not ensured that all of the taxi drivers have a good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.

Since the closure of the original key stage 3 site, the local authority and dual placement schools have not ensured that all pupils in key stage 3 have been able to have a full timetable. This will only be possible after the current Year 11 pupils leave for study leave, due to the centre's physical capacity.

The centre has had an interim leadership for too long. This continues to create uncertainty in the centre community and its partners. This hinders the authority of the senior leadership team to instigate their long-term vision for the centre.

Some of the secondary schools that have dual pupil placements with Sherborne Learning Centre do not have close contact with the centre. Where pupils have dual placements, almost all of the schools do not have an expectation for pupils to attend their school once they are registered with the centre. In addition, some of them remove Year 11 pupils from their roll before the annual school census. This puts greater pressure on the centre and parents to ensure pupils' safety when they are not expected to attend the centre.