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Mr Chris Wonfor
Interim principal
Southfield School
Gipsy Lane
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Dear Mr Wonfor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield School

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 July 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 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 March 2016.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The post-Ofsted action plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2016

- Significantly improve leadership and management so that essential improvements are made by:
 - ensuring that arrangements to safeguard pupils are robust
 - implementing rigorous and effective systems for managing staff performance so that staff are held to account for their impact on pupils' achievement
 - developing a culture where staff work together for the benefit of pupils
 - ensuring that leaders' self-evaluations are accurate and based on rigorous monitoring by leaders
 - sharpening leaders' plans for improvement so that they are more focused on the key issues for improvement
 - making rapid improvements to the curriculum so that it more consistently meets the needs of pupils
 - ensuring governors challenge leaders effectively and develop more robust systems for staff to raise concerns.

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

- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - adapting the curriculum so that it supports pupils with the most complex needs
 - ensuring staff receive up-to-date training on meeting the needs of pupils with a range of needs
 - reducing the number of exclusions.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and results in good progress for all groups of pupils by:
 - raising teachers' expectations for what pupils with the most complex needs can achieve
 - tackling weaknesses in certain subjects, such as science
 - ensuring pupils' work consistently has the appropriate level of challenge, especially for the most able, and builds on what pupils already know and can do
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge, particularly those who work with pupils who have the most complex needs
 - ensuring that lessons more consistently capture the interest and enthusiasm of pupils.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 July 2016

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, met with members of the governing body (including the chair and vice-chair), senior leaders, a group of staff, a group of pupils, and a representative from the local authority who supports the school. Observations of learning were carried out in the secondary and primary areas of the school. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector scrutinised documents, including records of safety checks made on staff, the post-Ofsted action plan and a formal letter written by a member of staff to Her Majesty's Inspector and the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector spoke with a parent on the telephone and held a telephone conversation with the local authority's designated officer.

Her Majesty's Inspector was made aware, during this inspection, that a number of serious incidents have been brought to light since the previous inspection and are currently under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incidents were considered (where appropriate) alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

During this inspection, the areas of improvement relating to safeguarding and behaviour were focused upon.

Context

The principal and deputy principal are currently suspended as are three other members of staff. The current interim principal had been in post for six days at the time of the inspection. He is the fourth interim principal; however, this is the fifth change to the role, as one interim principal has assumed the role twice. Currently, there is an interim deputy principal who is taking responsibility for behaviour. The role of assistant principal with responsibility for key stage 3 and key stage 4 is interim.

The behaviour manager is on long-term sick leave prior to his resignation commencing after 20 July 2016. The assistant principal responsible for safeguarding has recently returned after being on long-term sick leave. At the end of the summer term, a mathematics teacher is leaving and so is a newly qualified key stage 2 teacher. A new mathematics teacher has been appointed for September, as has a new deputy principal with responsibility for the curriculum. The role of behaviour manager had not been filled at the time of this monitoring inspection.

The governing body's delegated powers have been removed and now rest with the local authority. Governors have continued to pursue plans for the school to gain

academy status, including making a visit to the designated sponsor. The conversion to academy status is scheduled for December 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders, including the local authority and governors, have not ensured that the areas for development from the previous inspection have been implemented. Following the suspension of the principal and deputy principal, in April 2016, the school has had four different interim principals. Each interim principal has made changes, some of which overturned changes made by their predecessor. They have not, however, made the improvements needed to keep pupils and staff safe. In addition, one member of the senior leadership team has been absent due to long-term sick leave, leading to further gaps in leadership. Consequently, the school has been rudderless while experiencing profound instability. This serious situation has not only prevented the school from moving forward, but led to a substantial deterioration in the school, particularly in pupils' behaviour. Despite this, most staff have remained committed to the school and the pupils.

Pupils and staff are not safe at the school. The erosion of the authority of staff means that a number of pupils repeatedly ignore the instructions they are given. Some pupils act in such a way as to put themselves, and those around them, at risk. Her Majesty's Inspector witnessed pupils showing aggression towards other pupils and towards staff, including pushing staff out of the way, spitting at them and kicking out at them. Pupils still have access to the flat roof, which was identified as a safety concern in the previous inspection report. Despite staff remonstrating with pupils to come down from the roof, pupils continue to climb onto the roof and along the high fence. When doing this, pupils put their own safety at risk and the safety of the staff who endeavour to keep them safe while they are on the roof. So grave were Her Majesty's Inspector's concerns that the local authority was requested to take immediate action to keep pupils and staff safe.

Following the previous inspection, the local authority removed the delegated powers of the governing body. In order to ratify decisions about finance and staffing, the governing body now needs to gain the agreement of the local authority. Governors are not clear enough about the implications of the removal of their delegated powers. In particular, they do not understand that this situation requires greater collaboration between the governing body and the local authority. There are unhelpful differences between some members of the governing body and the local authority and this too prevents the school from moving forward.

The post-Ofsted action plan is detailed and is linked closely to the authority's statement of action, with milestones in place. However, it is not fit for purpose because it does not indicate who is responsible for monitoring how effective the implementation of the plan is. In addition, the criteria by which milestones are judged as successful are not closely enough based on the difference planned actions will make to pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers and assistants in the secondary part of the school have concentrated on containing pupils' behaviour and therefore have not tackled the areas for improvement in teaching. This approach has been more successful for lower key stage 3 than in other year groups. The disruption caused by some pupils' very challenging behaviour, most significantly but not solely in key stage 4, means it is very difficult for those pupils who want to learn to do so.

In key stage 2, pupils' behaviour is better than in key stage 4 and upper key stage 3 and some learning is taking place. However, some pupils with specific learning needs are not having those needs catered for well enough. As a result, their progress is slow. A number of pupils showed that they were able to apply the key skills they had learned from their reading when completing their autobiographies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has declined since the previous inspection. Some pupils, especially in upper key stage 3 and in key stage 4, are openly aggressive and hostile toward staff and other pupils. A number of pupils do not carry out teachers' instructions and respond to them by using abusive language and aggression, including pushing teachers out of the way. Pupils do not respect the boundaries between themselves and staff and are, sometimes, over-familiar with staff. Consequently, despite a reduction in the number of exclusions being an area for improvement following the last inspection, the number has risen dramatically since April 2016. In addition, attendance since April 2016 has been very low.

Pupils behave better in key stage 2 than in key stage 4 or in upper key stage 3 classes. In key stage 2 most pupils treat their teachers with greater respect. They show enthusiasm for their work and interact with each other more positively. However, some pupils whose learning needs are not being met by the work they are set show their frustration by disrupting others.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes have not improved in the school because, since April, staff have, by necessity, focused on keeping the school afloat. Pupils' progress is tracked using national curriculum levels, which are now no longer used by the government. The collated information on pupils' progress, shown during the inspection, was for the spring term rather than the summer term. Although information on pupils' progress over the summer term has been gathered, it has not been collated or interpreted. This is due to gaps in leadership. Therefore, it is not possible to comment on pupils' progress since the previous inspection with any degree of reliability.

In addition, the behaviour of a number of pupils, notably in upper key stage 3 and key stage 4, has been very poor. These pupils have had a detrimental effect on

others' learning and behaviour, so standards reached in lessons and pupils' progress have been poor. Some pupils in Year 11, who have now left, have achieved level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications, following completing courses undertaken at local colleges.

External support

External support from the authority, since April, has not provided the school with the stability it has needed. There have been too many different interim principals. In some cases this has been due to unforeseen circumstances, but not in all cases. The local authority representative has visited the school to work with interim principals on a weekly basis but has not observed the school at work. He has relied too much on the views of others about how pupils are behaving. In addition, the local authority has not made it clear enough to the governing body what its role is, and what the local authority's role is, in developing improvement plans. This has created confusion and tension, in what is already a turbulent situation.

The local authority has, following this monitoring inspection, provided assurances that action will be taken to ensure that pupils and staff are safe. This has included a meeting between the governing body and the director of children's services for Wokingham.

The school commissioned a detailed health and safety report following the previous inspection. Some recommendations from this report have been acted upon. However, changes that will prevent pupils from accessing the flat roofs have not yet been carried out. These are scheduled for the summer holiday.

The following priorities have been added, in the light of the serious concerns outlined in this letter.

- Ensure that actions to keep pupils and staff safe, that were agreed immediately following this inspection, are urgently and fully implemented.

