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Mr J Bradshaw
Interim Principal
James Brindley School
Bell Barn Road
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Dear Mr Bradshaw

Special measures monitoring inspection of James Brindley School

Following my visit with Denah Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 24–25 February 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.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that the procedures for safeguarding are equally good across all centres by:
 - making sure that non-attendance is always followed up swiftly, that very prompt action is taken when a pupil's whereabouts are not known, and that all actions are clearly recorded
 - tailoring the safeguarding policy so that it deals specifically with the needs of the different groups of pupils who are taught by the school
 - ensuring that all staff know the procedures to follow and who to go to at their own centre when they have a concern about a pupil's wellbeing
 - making sure that governors know how effective safeguarding procedures are at each centre
 - minimising the use of part-time timetables at all centres
 - reviewing the Pathways programme so that pupils have access to full-time education, or as close as their medical needs allow, in line with statutory guidance.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that all safeguarding procedures are effective, including those for following up non-attendance
 - accurately analysing pupils' attendance at each centre and the reasons for non-attendance
 - thoroughly analysing the work of each centre so that strengths can be maximised, and relevant actions planned and implemented
 - consistently following up monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure that the actions that have been identified for staff to take have been taken
 - ensuring that information about pupils' achievement is analysed precisely in order to know if pupils at different centres, with different needs and staying for different lengths of time, are making enough progress
 - ensuring that governors receive full, accurate and timely information about all aspects of the school's work, particularly safeguarding, attendance and achievement, so that they can provide more effective challenge and support
 - seeking to expand the governing body so that they can distribute tasks and gather first-hand evidence of the effectiveness of each centre.

- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - setting high expectations for each pupil's attendance
 - developing a more effective range of strategies to help those pupils with low attendance to attend more frequently
 - emphasising the importance of attendance at lessons in each of the centres
 - celebrating good and greatly improved attendance at school and at lessons.

- Improve the quality of teaching and thereby the outcomes for pupils, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - consistently using assessment information as well as a range of monitoring information to identify aspects of teachers' work that need improvement, and supporting and challenging teachers in a focused way so that these improvements happen
 - ensuring that all teachers expect consistently high standards of effort and presentation from pupils
 - making sure that marking is frequent enough and helps pupils to feel proud of what they have achieved, and to know what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring that all learning environments across all centres are of an equally high standard and support learning.

An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24–25 February 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, pupils and health professionals. A telephone conversation was held with a local authority officer. Not all the school's sites were visited during this monitoring inspection. Inspectors visited Parkway, Bridgeways, Larimar, Ardenleigh and Birmingham Children's Hospital, where they spent time in lessons in classrooms and on wards, and spoke to pupils and staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, six teachers and four members of support staff have left the school. Six support staff and five teachers have joined.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim principal continues to provide a clear direction for the school. His close analysis of every aspect of this complex institution is ensuring that no stone is left unturned in the drive for continuous improvement. He is very well supported by the senior leaders, whose work on crucial areas of the school development plan has led to a range of improvements since the previous monitoring inspection.

Staff have received a series of up-to-date training sessions on safeguarding since the previous inspection, including those focused on radicalisation and extremism, and on promoting a safe culture in the school. Weekly updates remind staff about key aspects of child protection and safeguarding. All new staff have received safeguarding training as part of their induction. A new code of conduct for staff has been introduced. This usefully sets out clearly the expectations of all staff in the school and is helpfully linked to other policies.

Attendance continues to be monitored thoroughly. Leaders are fully aware of where there are issues with attendance for particular individuals or for centres, and they challenge and support accordingly. For some of the pupils with the most complex needs, innovative solutions help them to receive education even when they are unable to be present in a classroom.

The system for tracking pupils' progress has improved. Leaders are now able to see how well pupils are progressing in English, mathematics and science; they are intending to extend the system to include all subject areas very soon. There is a suitable emphasis on helping pupils to make accelerated progress to make up for lost learning. Leaders are aware that work remains to be done to ensure that staff are clear about the best ways of assessing the progress that pupils are making over time, and to moderate the assessments that teachers make. The process for

assuring the quality of teaching is developing well. A well-designed system helps leaders to plan their visits to lessons and to take into account other important evidence about the quality of teaching, such as scrutinies of pupils' work, when making judgements.

Teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics continue to improve. The subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of mathematics teaching and progress across the sectors. She is taking the steps needed to improve the weaker elements while maximising the strengths. Sensibly, the school has chosen to teach the new National Curriculum to all pupils to facilitate a smooth transfer for pupils going back to their home schools.

Progress in improving provision and outcomes in English has been slower. There has been a hiatus in leadership in English and one of the assistant headteachers has very recently taken on the head of department role on a temporary basis. He has quickly identified the need to help teachers to work more closely together to plan and assess, and to decide on the best approaches to teaching aspects of English, such as texts.

The interim principal, in conjunction with governors and senior leaders, has formulated a clear plan for the school's next steps. This includes a sensible emphasis on creating different curriculum pathways for pupils according to their needs, to ensure that they can move on to suitable destinations post-16 or to mainstream schools if they are younger.

Too many pupils are receiving home tuition for lengthy periods of time. This results in their becoming isolated from their peers. Despite the school's best efforts to support them into suitable placements post-school, a high number of these pupils end up out of education, training or employment post-16. The interim principal and senior leaders have rightly identified that there are serious flaws in the process by which pupils are referred to the school for home tuition. Currently, there is no involvement from the local authority in the referral process. Placements in home tuition are not time limited and the pupil's own school does not always remain sufficiently involved in the process. There are no protocols to specify the parameters of the home tuition, the length of time for which it will happen and the role that the referring school should play in the process. Very recently, the local authority has become involved in working with the school to improve the way in which home tuition is used. Both the authority and the school are committed to ensuring that these improvements are made as a matter of urgency.

The classroom provided for the school at Larimar is too small to seat comfortably all the pupils on roll, and where health professionals also need to be present this becomes even more problematic. It is very difficult for pupils to get up to move around the room when they need to, for example to write something on the board.

Governance continues to develop very well. The new governance committees, linked to each sector, are providing governors with a good understanding of the detail of each sector and their differing needs and demands. Key items such as safeguarding appear on each committee's agenda, which ensures a good level of attention to detail. Sensibly, the governing body has extended the contract for the interim principal indefinitely to enable the school to continue to improve at the necessary rate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the lessons visited had a clear focus on learning and progress. Classrooms are well presented, with useful learning prompts and some good-quality displays. Lessons had clear structures and teachers generally communicated well what pupils were expected to do and to learn. Where learning was most effective, teachers generated a real sense of purpose, to which pupils responded well. For example, in an information communication technology lesson, pupils were designing a website. They were extremely clear about the purpose, the teacher gave frequent feedback to individuals, second best was not accepted and praise was given for genuinely good outcomes. Pupils were making rapid progress as a result. In a history lesson, pupils responded very well to the good questioning and well-structured written task, and a lively discussion about the history of medicine ensued. In an art lesson, pupils worked independently with great focus and knew exactly what they were aiming to achieve. In a few lessons, tasks were somewhat mechanistic; while pupils cooperated, they were not enthused and needed to be cajoled or prompted to complete their work.

In the hospital and the specialist settings visited, lessons were skilfully adapted to meet the very individual needs of the pupils. This is the norm and, as a result, assessment information shows that many of these pupils make positive progress over time despite the barriers they are facing.

Mathematical reasoning is being developed well through effective questioning. In mathematics lessons, pupils are routinely asked to explain their methods and their reasoning. The school is aware that the teaching of problem solving in mathematics is not currently strong and knows that this is a priority for further development. Pupils do not have enough access to equipment to help them to develop their number skills, such as fractions, place values and decimals. As soon as this weakness came to light during the inspection, the mathematics leader came up with an innovative solution and is developing a toolkit of resources for all mathematics teachers across the sectors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils were pleasant, polite and welcoming to inspectors, despite their anxieties. On all the sites visited, they had good relationships with staff and with each other. Pupils continually benefit from the strong emphasis placed on respecting each other's individual needs and are mature in their attitudes to people's difficulties.

The pupil parliament is well established and is taken seriously by pupils and staff. Members of the pupil parliament to whom inspectors talked explained articulately about how the school has helped them to improve their achievement and well-being. They are pleased to have been able to influence changes such as those recently made to school meals, the reading and leisure activities at lunchtime and the curriculum.

Attendance at Dovedale continues to be positive. Low or sporadic attendance continues to be an issue for many pupils at other centres. All the centres are working well with parents and health agencies to challenge and support individuals to attend as much as they possibly can.

Outcomes for pupils

As the organisation and teaching of mathematics has improved, so have the outcomes for pupils. More pupils are now starting to make nationally expected rates of progress. Where they have gaps in their learning, teachers are becoming better at analysing and remedying these, which in turn is helping them to learn more effectively. In English, progress over time is less clear, although when inspectors looked at pupils' books during the inspection some positive progress was evident. Again, better assessment information is helping teachers to see where pupils have gaps in their learning. In the lessons visited during the inspection across a range of subjects, pupils' books, folders and their work during the lessons usually showed that they were making steady progress when they were in the school or being taught at home. Gaps in progress arise when pupils are absent for extended periods or attend only sporadically.

External support

The interim principal, with the support of the governing body, has continued to commission a range of useful and relevant support for the school.