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Mr J Bradshaw
Interim Principal
James Brindley School
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Dear Mr Bradshaw

Special measures monitoring inspection of James Brindley School

Following my visit with Rowena Green, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 21–22 June 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 fourth 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 standards 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 21–22 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, senior leaders, staff, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and two other governors, groups of pupils and a local authority officer. Not all the school's sites were visited during this monitoring inspection. Inspectors were based at Parkway where they held meetings with staff and pupils from different sectors. Inspectors visited Dovedale and Willows where they spent time in lessons in classrooms and on wards, and spoke to pupils and staff.

The school is restructuring its main teaching centres and this inspection focused on how well prepared pupils, staff and leaders are for the start of the academic year in September.

Context

Since the previous inspection, three teachers and six members of support staff have left the school. One teacher and two members of support staff have joined. The substantive principal is no longer employed by the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

A great deal of time, energy and careful thought has been put into the reorganisation of the teaching centres and the new curriculum for September. In order to meet pupils' needs more fully, Northfield will cater for key stage 3 pupils and Parkway for key stage 4. The plans for the new curriculum are well thought through. The key stage 3 curriculum will, rightly, focus on filling the gaps in pupils' learning and on helping them to regain lost confidence in their abilities. At the same time, it is intended to give them greater opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, teach them life skills such as independent travel and ensure that they take a full part in physical activity. Leaders and staff have been working closely together to ensure that curriculum plans are ready and fit for purpose. A residential experience for all key stage 3 pupils is due to take place in September in order for all pupils to get to know each other.

At key stage 4, leaders have sensibly ensured that Year 11 pupils continue to study the courses they have followed in Year 10. The new Year 10 pupils, however, have had a wider range of options from which to choose. There is an appropriate emphasis on pupils taking qualifications at the highest level that they are able to. Again, physical activity is planned into each week.

Positive changes are also happening to the curriculum in the specialist sectors and at Dovedale. New accredited courses, greater breadth and new subjects are being introduced.

Where staff are moving to new roles in September, they have been carefully supported ready for the changes. Meetings have taken place in new teams. Importantly, there are transition events during the last three weeks of this term where staff and pupils will spend time in their new centres. 'Excited but apprehensive' seemed to be a common view from staff about how they and their colleagues are feeling about the changes. Importantly, many teaching assistants' roles are to be focused more specifically on supporting pupils to make better progress, rather than on managing behaviour.

Leaders have dealt systematically with the issues that were raised during the previous monitoring visit, and with weaknesses that they themselves had identified at that time. The lack of teaching space at Larimar is about to be remedied, following negotiations with the health service. An extensive service level agreement has been developed with the local authority for the placement of pupils at James Brindley. Resource boxes have been put together for mathematics teachers to use.

Good progress has been made in rationalising the use of home tuition. Good relationships have been developed with the local authority. Sensibly, the process is being approached in two parts. Provision for all the pupils who currently receive home tuition is being reviewed. Pupils are returning to their home school or joining classes at James Brindley according to their needs. The number of pupils receiving home tuition has reduced by 25% since the previous monitoring inspection. At the same time, a strategic approach to assessing pupils' needs when they are referred to home tuition is being developed. This is already leading to fewer pupils than previously being accepted onto this programme. Careful thought is being given to how to integrate pupils who receive home tuition into each teaching centre as quickly as possible.

Aspects of provision at the Willows had caused the school concern in the early part of this year. The interim principal commissioned a review of this provision and made changes to leadership as a result. Swift action took place to improve relationships between teaching and health staff, the attendance of pupils, communication with parents, the quality of teaching and the tracking of pupils' progress. A visit to Willows during the inspection, alongside scrutiny of documentary evidence, showed that the actions taken have been very effective. The centre has been well led and managed this term. Good succession planning for September has also taken place.

The school has continued to pay careful attention to all aspects of safeguarding. Site security has been increased where this has been felt to be necessary. New training for staff has taken place on radicalisation and extremism, and a catch-up session is planned for September.

Three training sessions on safeguarding are planned for the coming year, to include all staff. Appropriate training is taking place for designated safeguarding leads. The weekly staff newsletter retains a strong emphasis on safeguarding.

The appointment of two vice-principals from within the senior leadership team is leading to some reorganisation of responsibilities. Senior leaders are working very hard to ensure that the arrangements for September are fully in place, and time pressures have meant that they have not had much opportunity to meet as a complete team to finalise who is doing what. However, such a meeting is imminent and leaders are aware of the need to meet frequently during the new academic year with each other and with their teams in order to mitigate the potential issues caused by remote working across 13 sites.

Governance continues to develop well. New governors have added to the breadth of knowledge within the governing body. Careful attention is being paid to financial planning and accountability. Governors continue to scrutinise the effectiveness of safeguarding thoroughly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The system for tracking pupils' progress is now well developed. It allows leaders to analyse progress by sector, subject or pupil. There is an expectation that interventions are identified and logged where pupils are not making enough progress. However, there are some gaps in the assessment information that is being entered into the system. Leaders are aware of the need to make sure that teachers enter the information properly when required, and that this is checked and followed up by middle leaders, so that the system quickly becomes fully operational.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils to whom inspectors spoke during the inspection are largely positive about the forthcoming changes. They are well informed about what their provision will look like in September. One suggested that while they might not have liked the idea of change at the start, they are 'warming to it', which reflects the general view.

Pupils at Dovedale have introduced a healthy tuck shop which they run themselves. Pupils had to apply formally for roles running the tuck shop, and were interviewed before being appointed. They decide what to sell, purchase the stock and organise the sales process. The tuck shop is now a profit-making organisation of which the pupils are rightly proud.

The school continues to monitor attendance carefully at each centre and to follow up non-attendance where needed. There continue to be a number of pupils who do not attend as they should, while others attend very well.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's assessment information shows that most pupils are now making at least expected progress in mathematics across the centres. Progress in English is less positive than in mathematics, and questions remain about the accuracy of some of the assessment information in English. In the hospital and specialist sectors, many pupils continue to make good progress when their health allows.

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, for example to review provision at the Willows and to support subject leadership. The local authority has worked closely and positively with the school to support the review of home tuition.