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Miss Kim Carwardine
Head of School
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Worcestershire
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Dear Miss Carwardine

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Newbridge Short Stay Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 January 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Yates
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2019.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - building on recent improvements to the curriculum so that it is appropriate for pupils' needs and pupils make good progress in all subjects
 - ensuring that accurate information is used to judge the progress that pupils make
 - ensuring that staff consistently implement the school's behaviour policy
 - developing the school's new systems of monitoring so that inconsistencies in teaching are eradicated
 - ensuring that the additional pupil premium funding is accessed and used to support disadvantaged pupils to make good progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - making sure that teaching plans suitably challenge pupils of all abilities, including the most able pupils and those with SEND but who do not have an EHC plan
 - ensuring that staff use accurate information about pupils' prior attainment when planning lessons and activities
 - ensuring greater consistency across subjects.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour so that pupils behave better and understand how to learn productively
 - ensuring that pupils' attendance continues to rise
 - improving pupils' ability to understand how to stay healthy
 - improving pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and helping them to understand their responsibilities as well as their rights.

An external review of the school's use of 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 8 January 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the head of school, executive principal, other senior leaders, governors including the chair of the governing body, the attendance officer, the office manager and staff. The inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone.

The inspector visited lessons, accompanied by the assistant headteacher. The inspector spoke to pupils informally and observed behaviour in lessons and during social times.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes to the leadership structure. The previous headteacher left the school at the end of the academic year. A new head of school (previously the assistant headteacher) was appointed in September 2019. A new governing body, including a new chair, came into post in September 2019. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) left at the end of the summer term. Since September 2019, the head of school has filled this position. In November 2019, a teaching assistant was appointed as assistant special educational needs coordinator. The executive principal from the trust has been supporting the new head of school on a daily basis since September 2019.

During the autumn term, there was a high level of staff absence and a relatively high turnover of both teaching staff and classroom support staff. Leaders have appointed to these positions, with several staff having recently started at the school. An additional member of staff is due to start in February 2020.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders continue to improve the range of subjects that pupils are offered. Last year, the majority of pupils achieved a GCSE qualification in English and mathematics. A small number achieved a GCSE in science and statistics and a level 1 in construction. These subjects were part of the core offer.

In addition, some pupils were supported in continuing to study options they had started at their mainstream school. These included geography, statistics, sociology, business studies and religious studies. Most pupils achieved a GCSE in these subjects. As a result, the majority of pupils went on to appropriate post-16 provision. Tracking by the external careers adviser shows that the majority of pupils are still with these providers. Any that have since left continue to be supported by the school to find an alternative place.

This year, relationships and sex education (RSE), health education, art, design technology and physical education (PE) have been added to the core curriculum to further extend the range of accreditation the school offers its pupils. Leaders continually review the curriculum. This term they are introducing personalised timetables to better meet pupils' needs.

However, the actions taken by leaders to improve the curriculum offer has been hindered by the high level of staff absence and a relatively high turnover of staff. As a result, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. There are very early signs of improvement in English, food technology and PE. However, the quality of teaching overall is weak.

A new assessment system is in place. It provides targets for pupils based on their key stage 2 progress as well as considering their social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils now have an aspirational target in all subjects. However, due to staff absence, the system has not yet been developed across the school. The use of the system is therefore either in its infancy, as in English and PE, or has not yet started. Its impact, therefore, is negligible.

Where teaching is effective, such as in English, PE and food technology, teachers have good subject knowledge. Positive relationships support pupils' learning, and pupils show interest and enthusiasm for the subject. However, pupils' attendance to lessons is low. This is because they are absent from school or choose not to attend lessons when in school. In addition, some pupils not in lessons disrupt the learning of those who are, by banging on classroom doors and shouting at pupils in the classroom. This significantly hinders pupils' progress.

Leaders have introduced house assemblies. Assembly themes are based on developing pupils' understanding of their responsibilities as well as their rights. The Newbridge values have been introduced, which are based on fundamental British values. Leaders shared examples of where this is beginning to make a difference to some individuals. For example, a pupil took responsibility for their behaviour by writing a letter of apology for causing damage to property. Pupils in PE write about how their learning in this subject will help them in other subjects. For example, they feel that their communication skills and resilience are improving. However, many pupils' conduct at school indicates that they do not fully embrace these values. The school's work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and appreciation remains weak. For example, pupils regularly use inappropriate language and make derogatory remarks to each other.

Although it remains low, attendance is improving over time. The attendance officer monitors and tracks pupils' attendance effectively. However, persistent absence remains high and shows little improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are using this to prioritise the areas for improvement that are closely aligned to those identified at the previous inspection. However, their action plans do not state who is responsible for each action and lack measurable success criteria. Consequently, leaders are not able to demonstrate the impact of their actions, and governors are unable to hold leaders more closely to account.

Leaders and the executive principal regularly monitor the quality of teaching. As a result, they have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. However, the impact of their actions on improving the quality of teaching is yet to be realised because of the high level of staff absence and the high turnover of staff.

Leaders are reflective. They continually review and evaluate their actions. They provide effective modelling for staff through, for example, the planning of assemblies to support teachers' planning and in the support given to staff to manage behaviour. Staff value this.

Pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding are now identified. Interventions have started to support their learning. However, the impact of these interventions needs to be evaluated. A pupil premium strategy is yet to be written. Once these actions have been addressed, leaders intend to plan an external pupil premium review. Leaders' view is that an external review will help to identify additional actions that they may need to take.

Leaders and governors consider staff workload and staff well-being. For example, they provide staff with dedicated time in their weekly timetables for planning and preparation and keep after-school commitments to a minimum. This has helped in the recruitment of new staff to the school.

Governors are committed to the school and are ambitious for what the pupils can achieve. The chair of the governing body provides effective support to the head of school. For example, she has led staff training on how to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health.

External support

The school has recently begun to receive support from the headteacher and deputy headteacher of a local pupil referral unit. They have completed two out of their 20 planned visits. Given the weaknesses that remain in the school, the impact of this support is yet to be seen.