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Miss Ruth Ward
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Dear Miss Ward

Special measures monitoring inspection of Almondbury Community School

Following my visit with Tudor Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12–13 November 2019, 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 December 2018.

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 school's improvement plan is 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 interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kirklees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2018.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that leaders are vigilant in identifying pupils at risk of abuse or neglect
 - making sure that monitoring and quality assurance activities focus on improving pupils' progress
 - providing middle leaders with the necessary time and resources to monitor pupils' progress and improve the quality of teaching
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes
 - developing the curriculum at key stage 1 so that pupils achieve well in a wide range of subjects
 - checking that training provided to staff has the desired impact on pupils' learning
 - developing systems to analyse and evaluate data collected in the school about behaviour, racist incidents, exclusions and bullying so that patterns of concern can be identified and addressed
 - ensuring that governors undertake appropriate checks to verify that safeguarding arrangements are effective
 - ensuring that governors use pupil progress information to hold leaders to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils' outcomes improve across the school, particularly for boys, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, by:
 - eradicating weak teaching urgently, particularly in mathematics at key stage 3 and key stage 4
 - providing teachers with opportunities to observe good practice
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - reducing the variability in the quality of teaching across key stage 2
 - planning learning activities which interest and engage pupils so that low-level disruption is reduced.
- Improve the teaching of reading and writing in the early years and key stage 1 so that children get off to a strong start and make better progress by:
 - ensuring that all pupils, particularly those with lower starting points, experience systematic, synthetic phonics teaching that is carefully planned to meet their needs and abilities

- making sure that reading books are well matched to the sounds pupils have been taught and that they have the opportunity to practise and enjoy reading these books at home and at school
- teaching children to apply the sounds they have learned to their spelling so that they can write with greater independence across the curriculum.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils by:
 - reducing the incidence of poor behaviour exhibited by a small minority of pupils
 - reducing low-level disruption
 - continuing to improve the attendance of pupils
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching in personal skills and reflections is consistently high.

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 school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 November 2019 to 13 November 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with senior and middle leaders, a number of teachers and other staff, groups of pupils, members of the interim executive board and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector had a discussion with a parent by telephone.

Context

An interim headteacher was appointed following the inspection and left at the end of the summer term. The headteacher in post during the last inspection also left in the summer. A new headteacher took up post in September, along with a primary consultant leader from the partner school. The executive headteacher, appointed in January 2019, remains with the school.

A little over 20 members of staff have left the school since the last inspection. Approximately half of these were teachers and/or leaders. Several staff members are on long-term sick leave. Thirteen long-term supply staff are working in the school, eight of whom are teachers.

The local authority has made arrangements to close the secondary phase of the school from August 2020. The school will become a primary school. Secondary pupils and their parents and carers are currently selecting from a choice of three local secondary schools to attend from September. The number of pupils on roll has fallen from 694 at the time of the previous inspection to 515.

The Department for Education (DfE) has issued an academy order. The school, local authority and regional schools commissioner are in discussions with a potential new sponsor for the primary school, Impact Education Multi-Academy Trust. The timescale for the school to become an academy is uncertain.

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

The management of pupils' behaviour has improved substantially. Pupils, especially secondary pupils, value the improved, tighter and more positive regime. They remarked on how the vast majority of staff apply the agreed rules fairly. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive. Primary pupils say that they trust adults and feel safe. A very small number of staff are resistant to the new ways of working.

Inspectors observed the calm behaviour of pupils of all ages throughout the school site at social times. Pupils respond positively to staff requests. Secondary pupils benefit from opportunities at breaktimes to participate in constructive activities. The key stage 2 playground was a little boisterous at lunchtime; pupils were less

engaged in constructive activities. Pupils say that they see occasional rough play but that adults intervene to stop this. Older pupils say that fighting, which was previously frequent, rarely happens now.

Improved behaviour helps pupils to feel safe. For example, pupils say that there are no longer areas of the school site they are afraid to enter. They say that new rules about where they can and cannot go are fair.

Low-level disruption in classes is less common. Inspectors saw very little disruption in lessons. Pupils say that it does occur but that staff largely deal with this well. Primary-aged pupils say that most pupils behave well in lessons but that in most classes, one or two pupils are regularly disruptive. Teachers deal with this using the agreed sanctions. Pupils across the school were observed cooperating in class, following instructions and concentrating on their work.

The handful of older pupils who present more challenging behaviour appreciate regular mentoring meetings to help keep them on the straight and narrow. They feel that staff are more interested in them. Pupils like the fact that the new headteacher is 'everywhere'. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced. Exclusions are reserved for the most challenging behaviours only. Inspectors checked that exclusions are carried out by the headteacher legally and were satisfied that this is the case.

Attendance and rates of persistent absence have not significantly improved. However, a more effective attendance team has tightened up procedures. The partner school is providing helpful support.

The considerable turbulence in leadership and staffing, compounded by other challenging issues, has impeded leaders' progress in improving the quality of education. Leaders have rightly prioritised safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and stabilising the school. Leaders are taking positive steps to improve the quality of education. The very weakest teaching has been eradicated.

Pupils in key stage 1 are receiving a broader, more balanced and stimulating curriculum than at the time of the last inspection. In addition to daily reading, writing and mathematics, pupils have completed a good deal of work in geography, history, art and science, for example. Leaders have not yet planned in sufficient detail what pupils should learn from the early years to Year 6 in all subjects. Leaders have not yet considered the order in which each piece of learning should happen.

Leaders have introduced a suitably ambitious early reading curriculum. All teachers are following the same curriculum. They have set appropriate targets for what pupils should learn and by when. However, teachers and teaching assistants are not yet trained well enough to teach phonics highly effectively. Furthermore, the books selected for pupils to practise their reading are sometimes too hard. This means that they do not develop fluency and accuracy in their reading. This is because leaders have not yet matched reading books closely to pupils' developing phonics knowledge. Although leaders have identified the pupils falling behind, pupils are not

catching up quickly. Leaders have secured external professional support to assist with the development of early reading. Pupils' early writing is beginning to improve. They are learning to make use of their developing phonics knowledge to spell.

Outcomes in mathematics improved at key stage 4 this year. Support from the partner school put in place following the inspection helped pupils in Year 11 to make more rapid progress. A mathematics leader from the partner school is effectively supporting the secondary mathematics teachers, all of whom are supply teachers. Despite the fact that the secondary phase of the school is due to close in the summer, teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Teachers plan work that motivates and engages interest. Nevertheless, many pupils have much ground to make up in their learning. Staff are supporting well those pupils who will take GCSEs this year. Opportunities for pupils to solve mathematics problems need further development.

Understandably, leaders have not prioritised further development of the secondary curriculum. Leaders keep a close eye on the progress of pupils. Leaders and teachers, under very challenging conditions, are doing all they can to support secondary pupils in the last several months of their time in the school. Pupils said that they are learning more in lessons now that staffing is more stable. Arrangements are in place to ensure as smooth a transition as possible to pupils' next schools.

It is conceivable that the school could be removed from special measures within the required timescale. However, leaders will need to ensure that progress in improving the quality of education is swifter from this point on. The stabilising of the school means that leaders are better placed to bring about more rapid improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A disproportionate amount of energy and time has had to be spent by leaders steadying the ship after a period of substantial turbulence following the inspection. These difficulties were compounded by the planned closure of the secondary phase. However, leaders have made considerable headway in very challenging circumstances.

Leaders' strenuous efforts to change the culture of the school have paid off. The very large majority of staff are on board and have the best interests of the pupils at heart. Teachers who have stepped up into leadership roles appreciate the coaching and support they are receiving. They value the clear and precise steer from senior leaders. Leaders at all levels understand their roles and responsibilities.

Several leaders are quite new to their roles, including the headteacher and primary consultant leader. They have hit the ground running, evaluated accurately and are holding staff to account. Leaders have identified the right priorities. Written plans are clear about precisely what needs to be accomplished. However, the part of the plan that addresses curriculum development is less well considered.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Those aspects that were judged to be working well at the last inspection continue to do so. For example, staff remain vigilant and report large and small concerns to the right people. The current designated safeguarding leader keeps careful records. She takes appropriate action to assist pupils who are at risk of harm. The headteacher supervises the work of the safeguarding leader closely. Safeguarding concerns are a regular feature of daily leadership briefings so that all who need to know are aware of risks to identified pupils.

Leaders are aware of the greatest threats to pupils in the local community. They have taught pupils about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation and the risks of involvement in gangs and knife crime. These aspects of learning are being planned more systematically into the curriculum. While pupils are able to explain some basic rules of how to stay safe online, a few older primary-aged pupils were a little naïve about some aspects of e-safety.

Following the previous inspection, the local authority disbanded the governing body and put together an interim executive board (IEB). This highly strategic board is made up of suitably experienced and qualified people. The IEB meets every two or three weeks. It is thorough in the way that it checks the school's progress. IEB members ask challenging questions of leaders. They do not simply accept the word of leaders. They seek further confirmation that what leaders say is accurate. They have a firm grip on finances. They keep a close eye on safeguarding arrangements.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have addressed concerns about safeguarding identified at the last inspection. Leaders identify pupils who are at risk of abuse or neglect and take action.
- Leaders have introduced a much tighter and more positive approach to managing pupils' behaviour. The very large majority of staff and pupils are responding positively to the changes. Low-level disruption has been minimised. The most challenging pupils are being well supported.
- Pupils in key stage 1 are receiving a broader, more balanced curriculum. Pupils are interested in, and enjoying, their learning.
- Despite the planned closure of the secondary phase, leaders have ensured that pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are receiving as full a curriculum as possible. Leaders have minimised disruption to teaching by securing a full complement of committed staff.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers of early reading are not well-enough trained in this aspect of their work. Pupils who have fallen behind are not catching up quickly. Pupils' reading books are still not well matched to their developing phonic knowledge. This is a hindrance to pupils developing confidence and fluency in reading.

- The development of the primary curriculum is only just beginning. The detail of what should be taught in every subject, in what order and by when is not yet planned.

External support

Both the IEB and school leaders speak very highly of the invaluable support and challenge from the local authority. Personnel at the highest level in the local authority have been actively involved and closely monitoring progress. The local authority has made considerable additional financial and people resources available.

The partnership with Carr Manor Community School has made an enormous contribution to improving the school so far.