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Mr Arnet Donkin
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Dear Mr Arnet Donkin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

Following my visit with Nigel Evans, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Ofsted Inspectors Andrew Penman and Penny Mathers, to your school on 12–13 December 2017, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016. 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Leaders and governors must take urgent and immediate action to assure secure safeguarding and child protection arrangements throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that leaders responsible for safeguarding have the experience, knowledge and understanding to carry out their duties effectively
 - providing high-quality training for all staff to help them to identify risks to pupils and learners
 - installing a secure and reliable system for recording and referring concerns about pupils and learners
 - insisting that safeguarding procedures and practices are monitored closely, regularly and in accordance with expected good practice
 - making sure that risk assessments and care plans are comprehensive, up to date and shared routinely with those who teach and care for pupils and learners
 - implementing stricter procedures to maintain site security.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
 - reviewing and evaluating the vision, values and purpose of the school so that they are relevant and clear to all
 - making certain that leaders, governors and staff at all levels are held to account for the school's performance through a rigorous review and appraisal process
 - ensuring that the concerns raised about staff's care and support of pupils and learners are thoroughly investigated and recorded systematically
 - implementing a clear communication policy, including a consistent approach to the use of British sign language (BSL)
 - establishing an effective system for assessing, measuring, tracking and evaluating the progress of pupils and learners
 - analysing information about pupils' behaviour in order to bring about improvements.
- Improve teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils and learners by:
 - making better use of assessment information to set targets and plan for their learning, particularly but not exclusively in the primary phase
 - providing a more inspiring and orderly environment for primary-aged pupils
 - ensuring that the most able, including those who are disadvantaged, are

stretched and challenged to achieve highly

- focusing on improving the specialist college learners' communication and language skills, so that they are better equipped for their next steps and employment where appropriate.
- Ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools listed below.
- Ensure that monitoring undertaken by managers, governors and the independent visitor is effective in evaluating the quality of the residential provision and identifies areas for improvement.
- Ensure that staff receive good-quality supervision that leads directly to good progress for all pupils and learners.
- 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 should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 December 2017 to 13 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, senior leaders, staff, groups of pupils, college students and members of the governing body.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times. Together with leaders, they conducted visits to classrooms to observe pupils' progress and their attitudes to learning. Pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups was scrutinised.

Context

Significant changes in staffing have taken place since the school was deemed to require special measures in November 2016. Most notably, there is a new vice principal as well as a new designated lead for safeguarding. Following reconstitution there is now a board of trustees and a separate board of governors with governance oversight of the school and specialist college. There are currently nine governor vacancies. The number of pupils on roll has decreased which has resulted in a considerable reduction in staff.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last monitoring visit, there has been significant turbulence in staffing due to a high number of staff redundancies. A redundancy process was initiated in June 2017 due to lower than expected confirmed pupil numbers. Consequently, teachers were not informed of the outcome until very close to the start of the new academic year. This resulted in extremely low staff morale at the beginning of the school year. Senior leaders, trustees and governors recognise that as a result, they have failed to resolve the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. The culture of safeguarding is showing signs of improvement but remains weak. The new designated lead for safeguarding is working hard to have systems and procedures in place to more rigorously monitor and evaluate safeguarding arrangements but these have not yet resulted in consistent practice across the school. For example, some risk assessments are not fit for purpose to minimise potential dangers to pupils. In addition, procedures and processes following instances of physical restraint are poor. It is not clear how leaders monitor and analyse these events in order to effectively support pupils and reduce the number of occurrences.

Inspection evidence shows there is a lack of consistent implementation by staff of agreed policies and procedures, particularly in response to safeguarding incidents.

Leaders do not yet ensure that staff are confident to consistently apply actions they need to take to keep pupils safe and minimise risk.

The designated lead for safeguarding has a clear understanding of what is required and must ensure that the necessary changes are implemented without delay to keep pupils safe. Safeguarding will be scrutinised closely at the next monitoring visit.

Improvements to site security, driven by the appointment of a facilities and estates manager, have had a positive impact on the extent that pupils and students report feeling safe. They describe how they have welcomed the installation of the gates that have improved pupils' feeling of safety. The checks made when visitors arrive are more rigorous. For example, the signing-in procedures have improved, helping to reduce risk of harm to pupils.

The school's action plan to tackle weaknesses is in place. However, leaders have not refined the plan well enough as recommended at the time of the first monitoring visit. Consequently, there remains a lack of challenge by governors and trustees to ensure that leaders are held to account for the school's progress in completing planned actions to resolve weaknesses. However, governors are becoming increasingly aware of their roles and responsibilities; they have undertaken a skills audit to ensure that new governors bring the required skills and expertise to the task of challenging leaders to improve the school's performance.

The appointment of the new vice principal is having a significant and positive impact. She has galvanised the staff team, tirelessly working alongside leaders and staff to drive improvements. Together, leaders have introduced a range of new systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. While early indications show an improved staff morale, it is too soon to see notable improvements in pupils' achievement. For example, the launch of a more rigorous progress tracking and assessment system, as observed during the inspection, was well received by staff and has ensured a closer monitoring of staff's performance in relation to the difference they make to pupils' progress. The next monitoring inspection will carefully evaluate the impact of this work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains weak. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Teachers' assessment of what pupils know, understand and can do has not been sufficiently accurate. Scrutiny of pupils' work across the school and college shows that pupils' progress is frail. This is because weaknesses in assessments ensure that teachers do not consistently provide pupils with work that meets their needs. Consequently, this hampers the achievement of too many pupils, including the most able pupils.

In the college, teachers do not closely link learning activities to students' medium-

or long-term goals. This makes it difficult for students to see the relevance of the activity. Objectives are not sufficiently personalised or clear. Too often the language used in setting objectives is complex and not easy for students to understand. For example, an objective used for several students, 'I can make sure my verb tenses are correct' is not easily understood by students or staff. As a result, those concerned are unsure of what they need to do or the progress they are required to make. Teachers and their managers recognise the need to develop an English and mathematics curriculum that has a stronger emphasis on developing the skills students need for employment and adult life. They have implemented an initiative to develop students' English in preparation for employment, but it is still too early to judge the impact of this development.

The vice principal is taking the lead on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. She has quickly gathered a detailed and accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. She has acted promptly to ensure that staff have better access to high-quality coaching and mentoring alongside a more robust approach to professional development and training. As a result, there are some early signs of improvement in the quality of teaching. During the inspection, staff commented that they welcome the guidance and support the vice principal provides to improve their practice. 'She makes staff feel incredibly valued' and 'she is prompting staff to be self-reflective and is not afraid to challenge' are two examples of the many positive comments made by staff with regard to the leadership of the vice principal.

During the next special measures monitoring visit, it is important that teachers demonstrate improved practice. Learning activities need to be carefully planned to ensure that they precisely meet the needs of pupils and encourage them to make accelerated progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Pupils talk favourably of their school. They welcome the personal and emotional support the staff show them. During observations of learning and during informal breaks, inspectors saw no incidents of poor behaviour. Pupils typically engage well with staff and in their learning. This is particularly so where pupils are motivated and excited about their work as seen in their cookery lessons.

There are, however, a small number of pupils whose anxieties and complex needs result in inappropriate behaviour. These pupils can be unpredictable in the behaviour they display. Therefore, leaders need to ensure that these pupils receive the therapy, guidance and support they require in order to reduce their anxious behaviours and reduce risk to themselves, other pupils and staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes remain too low. Across the school, pupils from key stage 1 to key stage 5 are still not catching up quickly enough. Expectations of staff are not consistently high and so pupils' work in books is not of a high enough quality. For example, pupils are not regularly challenged to do their best and improve their work; untidy work is too readily accepted by staff and pupils.

The introduction of supported internships is at a very early stage for students. College leaders and managers recognise the need to improve the supported internship opportunities.

Leaders have implemented a detailed system to monitor and review pupils' progress. From this, they acknowledge that pupils' outcomes are not strong enough in the core subjects of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. Leaders have plans in place to tackle this but it is too early to judge their impact.

External support

Leaders acknowledge that they are not making effective use of external support available to them in order to rapidly improve the school. For example, there is currently no external school improvement partner in place. Leaders, including governors and trustees, are aware this needs to be actioned rapidly. Middle leaders are undertaking leadership training through the Exeter Teaching Schools Alliance; nevertheless, it is too soon to see the impact of this training.