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30 June 2022

Carl Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Woodlands Academy

Following my visit with Peter Stonier, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 28 and 29 June 2022, 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 most 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 November 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school continues to be inadequate. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Dave Gilkerson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 28 June and 29 June 2022

Context

Since the last full inspection of Woodlands Academy in November 2021, the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team have left the school. The Community Inclusive Trust appointed the current headteacher in December 2021. After taking up his post, the headteacher appointed a new senior leadership team. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum took up the post in April 2022. Four new members of the local school board have been appointed since the last inspection.

Restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have limited the access to the school for the governing body and trust leaders. Leaders of the multi-academy trust have stated that this affected their ability to understand the full scope of the problems at the school. There has been a significant outbreak of COVID-19 in the school since the last inspection which has affected pupils' attendance.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders are driving forward improvements at the school. Shortly after the headteacher's appointment, leaders wrote a 'Statement of Action and Support Plan' to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The plan sets out clear aims and appropriate actions to bring about improvement. Leaders revised this plan in January 2022 to ensure that it contained appropriate timescales and the names of those who will be responsible for the different actions. Leaders have since regularly reviewed and updated this plan. As a result, they are making progress in addressing the issues identified at the last inspection. For example, leaders have recruited staff to fill all vacancies. Pupils' attendance has increased during the spring and summer terms.

Leaders have ensured that pupils feel safe at the school. Establishing a secure safeguarding culture has been leaders' priority. All pupils who inspectors met said that they felt safe. Staff also reported that they feel the school is a much safer place to work.

The trust has invested in securing the site by installing new fencing and an entrance gate. Staff meet pupils from their taxis at the start of the day. This provides a secure and friendly welcome to the school. Pupils no longer abscond from the school site. As one pupil said, 'there used to be lots of runners and climbers and now there aren't any'.

Leaders and staff have worked hard to change the previous, 'chaotic' nature of the school. Pupils, staff and parents and carers commented that previously pupils spent very little time learning in the classroom. Teachers say that they can focus on teaching because the pupils' behaviour is much improved. Pupils appreciate the structures and routines that leaders have put in place. At first, some pupils did not like the new boundaries. Now, they say that the clear behaviour system helps them to feel more secure.

Staff know pupils well. They are creating effective relationships with the pupils, based on trust. However, there is more for leaders to do to ensure that all staff understand the complex needs of all pupils. Leaders have not ensured that they regularly review pupils' education and health care (EHC) plans. They have not taken the longer-term targets from these plans and broken them down into smaller steps. Teachers and pupils do not have termly targets to work towards. Leaders have not ensured that pupils' behaviour support plans precisely identify how staff should help pupils to manage their behaviour.

Some parents have expressed feelings of dissatisfaction about the way that staff respond to pupils' behaviour. They are concerned about staff's use of physical intervention. The number of physical interventions that staff have used has dropped dramatically since the new leadership has been in place. Pupils confirmed this. Leaders are looking to provide staff with different physical intervention training that is based on national restraint reduction guidance.

Leaders have recently turned their attention towards improving the quality of education. They have clear and ambitious plans to expand and improve the curriculum. They have started by widening the opportunities pupils have at key stage 4 to study GCSEs and other qualifications. For example, the science GCSE, which previously was solely a biology course, will be a combined science GCSE from September. There are also a range of vocational courses now on offer, such as motor vehicle and land-based studies.

Leaders have provided staff with training so that they better understand how pupils learn. Teachers and teaching assistants attend regular, after-school sessions designed to support them to improve their practice. This programme of training is still in its early stages. It is too soon to measure its impact.

Leaders are working with subject teachers to help them structure the curriculum. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum has been organised so that teachers know what to teach and when. Other subject areas are still to be developed, based on the model used for PSHE. Leaders are clear about the quality and consistency that is needed in this planning.

Leaders have not ensured that they check pupils' knowledge gaps when they first join the school. Teachers do not have assessment systems in place that provide the ongoing information that will help them identify what pupils need to learn next. This means that some pupils may be introduced to new learning before they are ready for it. Other pupils may not be moved on quickly enough to more challenging work.

Leaders recognise the importance of ensuring that pupils can read fluently and accurately. They understand that pupils not being fluent readers can be the trigger for poor behaviour in lessons. Some pupils can become frustrated quickly if they are unable to read the texts teachers give them. Staff use a variety of phonics-based resources to help pupils read. Leaders are aware that there is still more to do to help pupils develop a love of reading. This includes in relation to the training staff receive in teaching phonics, and the strategies leaders adopt to promote reading in lessons.

Staff say that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being. Leaders involve staff much more in decision making than they had been previously. Staff appreciate leaders listening to their views. There is a sense of teamwork and mutual support in the staff team. Staff say that they know that there is lots of work to be done but are determined to make things better for the pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that they share with parents and teachers information about the targets pupils have been set and the support pupils should receive. They have not ensured that EHC plans have been reviewed annually. Leaders need to ensure that pupils, parents and teachers understand the small steps of learning pupils should achieve that will help them build towards the end targets in their EHC plans. Leaders must ensure that they review and update EHC plans annually.
- There is not an accurate system in place to enable leaders to assess pupils when they start at the school. As a result, teachers do not know where pupils may have gaps in their knowledge and where pupils may need further support. Leaders should ensure that there is correct identification of pupils' starting points when they first arrive at the school, so that teachers can put in place the right support straight away.

Additional support

The multi-academy trust has provided the school with extra financial support. This has been effective in regard to securing the school site. It has also allowed school leaders to recruit new staff. From November 2021 until the end of January 2022, three members of the trust's executive leadership team were present in the school every day to offer support and ensure that rapid improvement in safeguarding procedures and behaviour took place. The trust has been slow in offering curriculum support. They have not provided sufficient support to staff as they have reviewed the English curriculum, for example.

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised the action and support plan along with other documents and met with: the headteacher; the deputy headteacher; other senior leaders; the multi-academy trust chief executive officer; the chair of trustees; two members of the local school board, including the chair; pupils; and staff. Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and parent questionnaires.