

26 March 2019

Report on The Jane Lane School, A College for Cognition and Learning.

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr C Towe

Executive Summary:

All maintained schools in Walsall have delegated authority by the council to ensure the effective governance and running of their schools. This authority is delegated to the Governing body and they are required to “fulfil its statutory functions in relation to the school and to be accountable for ensuring that its decisions support the best interests of the school and its pupils”¹

The Jane Lane School is one of 7 Schools in Walsall that provide special education for children and young people with complex needs. It currently has 156 pupils on roll aged between 7 years and 19 years old. In September 2017, Ofsted conducted a one-day review of safeguarding and leadership because of a number of parental complaints around safeguarding which the local authority endorsed at the time. The outcome of that review was that Ofsted considered safeguarding effective.

In September 2018, the local authority implemented a Schools Causing Concern Protocol to ensure robust and effective procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of all our schools. The Jane Lane School was rated RED, the highest level of concern and this was communicated to the Chair of Governors and Head teacher. The local authority commissioned reviews of leadership and management and safeguarding to validate our view and inform our recommendations of how to address any concerns identified. We required the Chair of Governors and Head teacher to develop an action plan to provide the local authority with confidence that the leadership of the school, a) recognised the issues and b) knew how to put things right.

On 11th November, 2018 the Interim Assistant Director, the Head of School Standards and Improvement, the School Governance Manager and a Human Resource Manager met with the Chair of Governors and Head teacher to discuss progress and assure ourselves the leadership of the school were taking the action necessary to put right identified concerns. We were not convinced by their response and so issued a formal School Standards and Performance Warning Notice to the Chair of Governors; this was copied to the Head teacher and Ofsted.

Ofsted conducted a full inspection in on 27th and 28th November 2018. The lead inspector advised the Chair of governors, Deputy Head teacher and the Interim School Improvement Manager that the school was inadequate in all areas and that there were safeguarding issues that needed urgent attention. There were issues that

¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Circular---2010-18-governors-guide.pdf>

the school and GB urgently needed to address and Ofsted shared their concerns with the local authority.

Immediate actions included the local authority brokering the support of two outstanding and experienced Head teachers (one with experience of SEND), to work with the Deputy Head teacher alongside the Interim School Improvement Manager, a School Improvement Partner and the Safeguarding Lead for Education. A combination of existing building work being undertaken, alongside a number of staff suspensions meant that it was difficult to keep the pupils safe, warm and dry and a decision was taken by the Chair of Governors with the full agreement of the local authority to close the school for the last 6 days before the end of term. The staff continued to attend and undertook training and changes to their classrooms. The School fully re opened after the Christmas break.

On the 14th January, 2019 the local authority issued the Chair of Governors with a further School Standard Performance Warning Notice requiring the governing body to resign within 5 days. The reason for this was to allow the local authority to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to select and put in place an Interim Executive Board (IEB) made up of very experienced governors familiar with taking on schools in special measures and securing rapid improvement. The governors did resign and an IEB was established.

An Interim Executive Board² (IEB) has been established at Jane Lane School. The Board is chaired by an experienced governor and IEB Lead and who is a former experienced Head teacher with a wealth of experience in terms of school leadership and turning round schools in challenging circumstances. The other members of the Board include a former Head teacher who whilst Head at a school in Walsall was rated one of the most improved in Walsall at the time for outcomes. In addition there is an experienced former special school Head teacher; a former Walsall Head and previous Chair of the Walsall Virtual School Management Board and also the Council's Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement. The Board is meeting fortnightly with immediate priorities being around monitoring delivery of the Post Ofsted action plan, the quality education provision being provided to all pupils of the school and human resource issues.

The local authority's Team Around the School meetings, Chaired by the Interim Assistant Director, Access and Achievement continued to monitor the school when it reopened in January. However, on the 4th February 2019 one of the supporting Head teachers advised the local authority that, following an early morning leadership meeting it was clear that they had no choice but to close the school because there were 25 staff absences, only 1 first aider on site and staff members responsible for administering medication absent. It was his view that in light of the staffing ratios they could not guarantee the safety of the children. In the event of a fire, not enough staff would know the procedures to evacuate the children safely from the building and there were not enough staff to provide intimate care and medical assistance to the children. The school was therefore closed and remained closed until the end of February half term.

Two meetings with parents were arranged on 13th February to advise them of the outcome of the Inspection report and explain the proposed arrangements for pupils

² An IEB is a small group of experienced governors, appointed by the Secretary of State to lead the governance of a school during a period of significant challenge/ governance failures in a school

to receive their education as soon possible. For those parents with either a children post 16 or primary aged, additional individual meetings were held to discuss the proposed arrangements for their child. For those parents not able to attend, information was sent to them, and/ or telephone contact was made to discuss the proposed arrangements with them.

An Academy Order was issued on the 8th February 2019.

The school reopened to staff on Monday, 25th February 2019 and for pupils on Wednesday, 27th February 2019. In order to ensure staffing levels, curriculum offer and the safety of pupils the following arrangements were put in place.

- Acting Head teacher brought in (existing Head teacher of an outstanding special school) alongside two Deputies and two Assistant Head teachers to increase capacity and support the existing Deputy.
- Post 16 Students (29) – alternative placements were identified and meetings took place with parents and students to agree where they would prefer to be placed. This included Walsall College, other training providers or alternative special schools.
- Secondary aged pupils (76) – returned to The Jane Lane School on a phased basis, starting with Y11 over the first week and remain at the school.
- Primary aged pupils (41) – were placed in a mixture of mainstream primary schools across the borough and special schools dependent on need and complexity. Wherever possible Jane Lane staff accompanied the children and separate spaces were created to accommodate their needs.
- Transport was arranged for all pupils or an allowance paid to parents if they use their own transport.

All pupils remain on roll of The Jane Lane school and plans are in place to bring back the primary pupils as soon as possible. The transition plan for primary pupils to return to school is aimed at having most, if not all pupils back on site before the end of term. For post 16 students who may settle into alternative courses, there may need to be further discussion as to whether it would be better for them to remain with their temporary providers until courses are completed.

Because of the complex nature of some children's needs and disruption already experienced, some parents have chosen to educate their children at home. The local authority is supporting these families to ensure that they can provide an appropriate education and that regular welfare visits are undertaken. The Early Help Team have identified those who might need help and ensured that this is provided.

Reason for scrutiny:

To reassure Members that appropriate action has been taken by the local authority in response to the recent inadequate judgement of the school.

Recommendations:**That:**

- 1. The Committee note the report and endorse the actions taken by the local authority in managing the case of a special school being judged inadequate.*
- 2. The Committee should receive an update in 3 months on progress.*

Background papers:

Schools Causing Concern Protocol, September 2018

No formal Designation Monitoring Visit – Ofsted report, 22nd September 2017

Full Inspection - Ofsted inspection report 7th February, 2019

Resource and legal considerations:

The resources for managing this situation are being funding through the High Needs block, the schools budget and existing budgets from Access and Achievement. The full cost of this to the local authority cannot yet be finalised.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes priorities linked to improving school readiness, improving educational outcomes, ensuring people possess the skills to enter and progress into work (Priority 1); improving emotional wellbeing of children and young people, enabling and empoweringphysical and mental health, removing unwanted variation in health care and ensuring services are inclusive (Priority 2).

Citizen impact:

None.

Environmental impact:

There is no identified environmental impact.

Performance management:

The Committee will be able to review, over time the impact of the actions taken with the aim of the School being removed from special measures as soon as possible.

Reducing inequalities:

All children and young people are entitled to access the most appropriate, high quality educational provision available. The mitigating actions taken by the local authority have tried to ensure that no pupils on roll at The Jane Lane school has been disadvantaged by the inevitable disruption caused.


Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? No

Consultation

Parents were invited to attend one of two meetings on 13th February setting out the proposed arrangements. For those parents with either a child aged 16 or primary aged, additional meetings were held to discuss the proposed arrangements for their child. For those parents not able to attend, information was sent to them.

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