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Summary

This is an improving school. Many staff and pupils recognise the significant changes that have taken place, especially since September 2017. Parents have expressed their strong support for the school through a public media campaign in response to a possible closure. The school has faced an uncertain future in the last six months. Leaders have not been distracted by these issues. Despite these recent improvements the school remains fragile. This is because too much staffing (including some leadership roles) is interim, systems for managing behaviour are not consistently applied and learning is not consistently interesting and engaging.

Leaders are taking effective action to address the issues raised by the most recent Ofsted inspection report. The school's plans for improvement are fit for purpose. Reasonable progress has been made and the pace of improvement has accelerated significantly since September 2017. Leaders have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the school remains fragile following recent extensive changes and challenges since being placed in special measures.

The headteacher has provided strong and focused leadership since she started working at the school in June 2017. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) has acted quickly to resolve leadership issues and a rapid staff re-structure. The pace of change achieved in resolving staffing has enabled the school to start to make more rapid progress in other aspects of its provision. The actions taken have also ensured the school is more financially sustainable, with a balanced in-year budget. The headteacher and the chair of the IEB have worked well together. Other senior staff provide strong support for school leadership. The leadership team works cohesively to ensure that priorities are identified and tackled quickly and efficiently. Effective actions have been taken to improve the

leadership of subjects. These middle leaders have benefited from the good range of additional support and training that has been provided for them. Some subject leader roles are, however, still interim and this contributes to the school's fragility. Subject leaders still need to ensure that all staff apply the school's expectations for learning and behaviour more consistently.

Teaching is improving. Teachers have received additional training and support to help them develop their skills and expertise. Many express a keen desire to continue to improve further and appreciate the additional support provided for them. Staffing is more stable since September 2017 and pupils appreciate having consistent teachers for their classes. They feel their learning is now more settled. Some teaching staff are in temporary roles. Staff have developed their understanding and skills in the use of assessment, particularly in relation to examination criteria, since September. Some teaching is still not effective enough. In particular the pace of some lessons, the level of expectation and use of formative assessment requires further improvement.

The attendance of pupils is improving, although for some it is still too low. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND remain a particular priority. Overall attendance is below average still. Staff and pupils recognise that the behaviour of most pupils is now much better and has improved since September 2017. The systems to manage behaviour are used more consistently. In a few lessons, where learning is not interesting, the behaviour of a small group of pupils is not good. This is especially the case for some boys, who engage in low level disruption. Exclusion has been relatively high as new leaders have sought to set out clearer expectations. The level of exclusion reflects the fact that the behaviour of a minority of pupils is not consistently good, including during break and lunch times.

Outcomes for pupils have started to improve. The 2017 Key Stage 4 examination results represented a considerable improvement when compared to 2016. Almost all groups of pupils did better, especially in English and mathematics. Interventions used to provide additional support, for example through a 'Saturday school' are helping current Year 11 pupils to catch up with gaps in their learning. However, improving the attainment and progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains a priority. Progress in science is still too weak. The school is still at a relatively early stage of developing its monitoring of progress across a wider range of subjects and year groups. Pupils are not making good progress yet across all year groups.

Context for this review

This review was commissioned by Oxfordshire local authority and carried out by David Bray on October 30/31 2017.

The review included the following activities:

- Checking plans for improvement and other information on performance provided by school leaders
- Two brief tours of the school during lessons and looking at some work across a range of year groups and subjects
- Interviews with pupils in Years 10 and 11 (his group was chosen by the school)
- Review of an anonymous survey of 90 pupils
- Review of an anonymous survey of 20 staff

- Meeting with the chair of the IEB and review of minutes of IEB meetings
- Meeting the headteacher (on several occasions) and an assistant headteacher
- Meeting subject leaders (across core and foundation subjects)
- Checking information on the school website
- A brief review of safeguarding

The school was inspected by Ofsted 7–8 March 2017. The outcomes of the inspection were as follows:

Overall effectiveness

Effectiveness of leadership and management
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
Personal development, behaviour and welfare
Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

Inadequate

Inadequate

Requires improvement

Inadequate

Because leadership and management were grade 4 (inadequate) the school was placed in special measures.

The local authority started the initial phase of a consultation about scope for a possible closure because of the low standards and relative lack of local demand for the school. A relatively high proportion of pupils live in another local authority, but attend this school because it is geographically close to their home. The DfE (through the RSC) has also been consulting stakeholders about possible arrangements to re-open the school as a sponsored academy.

The fate of the school has been closely monitored by the local community. Parents have supported the school strongly and the 'Save Chiltern Edge School from closure' group started a petition to keep the school open. This received a broad range of support. Initial discussions have taken place with the Department for Education about the possibility of his school opening as a sponsored academy. No decision had been reached about this at the time of this review visit.

The school is a smaller than average-sized comprehensive school. The numbers of pupils in the school have reduced over time. Most year groups currently have about 90 pupils. There are significantly fewer in the current Year 9 cohort. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is broadly average. The small numbers of pupils in each cohort are likely to make the profile of each year group distinctive. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan and/or statement of special educational needs is above average. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes are improving, although learning is not consistently strong yet. Key Stage 4 outcomes were especially weak in 2016. The school's progress 8 score was -0.40 (sig) - where 0.0 represents average progress and sig means statistically above or below average. For disadvantaged pupils it was -0.78(sig). The progress made by boys was weak. Progress in English was -0.56 (sig) and mathematics -0.38 (sig). Science and open subjects (subjects

chosen after English, maths, science, languages and humanities options) performed poorly. Overall there were no strengths.

- Progress 8 was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% in the country for the low prior attainment group.
- Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8 was significantly below national other and in the lowest 10% overall.
- Progress 8 in English was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% overall
- Progress 8 in English and mathematics was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% for disadvantaged pupils.
- Progress was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% in at least one of EBacc or open elements or science, languages or humanities for the group: disadvantaged.
- Attendance was low for the groups: FSM, SEN with EHC/statement, SEN support (in the lowest 10%).
- Persistent absence was high for the groups: FSM, SEN with EHC/statement, SEN support (in the highest 10%).

2017 provisional data shows an improved picture in several key areas. The progress 8 score was 0.07 (this is broadly average). English was 0.38 (likely to be sig+) and maths 0.01 (broadly average). Open subjects were 0.26 (partially a result of around one third taking the European Computer Driving Licence) and pupils did better in humanities and languages. Progress in science is still weak. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was sig- in maths and across a range of other subjects.

Across the school pupils are still not making good progress in a wide range of subjects because teaching is not consistently good. The use of a 'Saturday school' has enabled a key group of Year 11 pupils to start to fill the gaps in their understanding of core subjects since September 2017. Many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have still to catch up with their peers as a result of consistently weak teaching over time. Boys are achieving significantly less well than girls. Outcomes in a wide range of subjects are still weak. The school has strengths in PE, geography, dance, drama and design technology.

Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving. The school has experienced a significant turnover of teachers and support staff in the previous six months. A recent re-structuring of staff has started to lead to pupils experiencing a more consistent approach to learning in the large majority of lessons.

Learning varies considerably. Whilst some is well-paced and effective a small, but significant amount is still characterised by:

- low expectations
- inconsistent use of behaviour management systems
- fragile relationships with a few pupils, mainly boys, who find that lessons are not engaging
- activities that occupy pupils' time but which do not support their learning strongly

Staff and pupils believe the school has now managed to ensure that most staff focus more clearly on improving their approaches to learning. Staff who completed a survey recognised

the positive changes that had taken place since September and are committed to helping the school to improve further. The teaching of science remains a concern for some pupils. A few classes still have temporary staff teaching lessons and some have experienced a significant change of staffing over time. This has disrupted their learning. A small number of staff are receiving additional support and challenge.

A few staff are temporary and/or working in a consultant role. This is enabling the school to cover specific lessons with relatively skilled staff. The longer-term capacity of teaching across the school still requires significant development and teaching overall is still not consistently good.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The majority of pupils are proud of the school and behave well. They have responded well to the newly introduced expectations for uniform. Pupils recognise and appreciate the improvements made in staff expectations for behaviour since September 2017. Staff and pupils agree that behaviour is improving. The behaviour of a minority pupils is a concern and is having a negative effect on other pupils in the school. The majority of these are boys. Behaviour is not consistently good in a minority of lessons and during break and lunch time.

Exclusions are above average and have risen this term. This partially reflects the aim of new leaders to set out higher expectations. The majority of exclusions involve boys, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils say they are confident they could talk to someone in school if they had concerns about a particular issue. They feel that staff would respond positively and take their views seriously.

Attendance is below average. The current overall attendance this term is about 94%. Attendance is lower for pupils in Years 10 and 11. It is also lower for disadvantaged and SEND pupils. Actions to improve attendance are showing some signs of positive impact. It is too early to comment on how effective current strategies to improve attendance will be over a longer period of time.

The careers guidance provided for older pupils helps them to make informed choices about A level courses. It does not provide sufficient detail about routes into apprenticeships.

Leadership and management

This is an improving school. The headteacher has brought a clear sense of direction since taking up post. There has been much to do. She has been able to provide staff with clear feedback about strengths and weaknesses and ensured they understand the need for rapid further improvement. She has an accurate understanding of the school. Her energy, enthusiasm and determination have led to a strong focus for staff on achieving greater consistency in the application of the school's expectations for learning. She has introduced additional support and challenge to help staff who require it. Staff and pupils recognise the positive changes that have been introduced since she took up post. It is too early to know about the long-term sustained impact of her work at this school.

Other senior staff provide strong support for the headteacher. The senior team are working well together to drive the school forwards and to ensure the pace of change is maintained.

Middle leaders have taken on the revised expectations for their work with enthusiasm. They participate willingly in the additional training and support provided for them. Middle

leadership is still fragile because it is new, interim, or both. For example a new English leader will start in January, the maths leader is interim and the science leader is currently on maternity leave. Subject leaders have not yet had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching in subjects. This aspect of leadership has been provided by senior leaders and outside consultants. Leadership of subjects is still at an early stage of development.

The school provides pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. Teaching is improving, although still weak in some key areas. Assessment is becoming increasingly accurate. There is a limited range of extra-curricular activities available.

Resources have been managed well. This has enabled the school to set a revised, balanced budget for this year. The local authority has provided strong support through the IEB. The local authority has supported the staff re-structure, despite the fact that this is a foundation school (where governors took on responsibility for these areas of employment).

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Appropriate checks are made to ensure that adults are suitably qualified and experienced. Checks are made to ensure visitors are vetted. Staff receive regular training in safeguarding and the systems for reporting any concerns they might have are clear and managed well.

The IEB has provided strong and purposeful leadership for the school during a significant period of change. In the time since the previous inspection took place the school has lost a headteacher, deputy headteacher, business manager and been through a very significant period of staff re-structuring. A new headteacher has started working at the school. Discussions have taken place about a possible academy sponsor for the school. The pace of change has had the potential to de-stabilise the school further. The IEB has supported the school effectively through this period. They have taken on a strong role in the leadership of many of the changes taking place and enabled the headteacher to start in September with a clear agenda for improving the school.

The school does not meet requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Progress against the Ofsted key issues

The previous inspection report identified several areas for improvement, grouped under main key headings.

1. Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:

– ensuring that improvement plans have clear targets and success criteria, so that governors and leaders can evaluate school effectiveness more accurately

Improvement plans have been regularly updated and reviewed. They relate closely to the priorities identified in the previous Ofsted inspection. Priorities have been developed further or supplemented where this is relevant. The governing body was replaced by an IEB in May 2017. The IEB has taken robust and timely action in order to provide support for the school in addressing staffing issues, re-structuring of staffing and putting in place actions to address a very significant ongoing budget deficit.

– ensuring that governors challenge school leaders, particularly on the performance of pupils

The Chair of the IEB has a realistic and accurate awareness of the previous under-achievement of pupils and is kept well informed about the progress being made across a wide range of year groups and subjects. The IEB has acted quickly to recruit a new headteacher for the school. This has contributed strongly to the improved capacity for leadership.

– monitoring pupils' progress closely and using what is learned to inform next steps

The process of setting up expectations for information on pupil's progress have been put in place. The first data has been collected across a wide range of subjects. It is too early to comment on the accuracy or effectiveness of this information, although school leaders have taken appropriate actions to try to ensure the data is robust and accurate.

– making sure that the school's behaviour management system is consistently used to monitor and deal with derogatory language, so that bullying is eliminated and pupils feel safe

The school's systems have been reviewed and updated. Views on the effectiveness of the approaches to managing behaviour are mostly positive. Pupils and staff recognise that significant improvements have taken place since September. Behaviour is affected by pupil's experience of particular classes, teachers and subjects. Some lessons are still disrupted. This includes low level, off task behaviour, or a general lack of engagement with learning. This behaviour is reducing, but is still prevalent in too many lessons and having a negative effect on the progress made by some pupils.

– ensuring that leaders and governors routinely evaluate pupil premium expenditure so that it is focused on activities that rapidly improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

A plan has been produced on the use of pupil premium funding for 2017/18. This aspect of leadership has been weak and has not been evaluated routinely. Relevant information is not currently available on the school website (statutory requirement). There is no up to date report on the use of catch up funding. Leaders understand that it is now a priority. Leaders are able to state how they plan to address these issues. Impact is not yet evident.

– strengthening subject leadership in English, mathematics and science

School leaders have taken actions to try to improve leadership in core subjects. In each case the outcome of these actions is more focused attention given to improving the progress made by pupils, especially those in Year 11. At this stage of the school's journey towards improvement actions have necessarily been short term fixes. Leaders are aware of the need to make leadership capacity more sustained. For example, the current Head of Maths is an interim appointment. The head of science is being covered during a maternity leave. The Head of English is leaving and will be replaced in January 2018. Subject leaders are currently working through a programme of training and development. Subject leadership across a wide range of subjects, including English, maths and science, is still at an early stage of development and subject leaders are not yet having sufficient effect on improving their subject areas.

– further improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The staff re-structuring has resulted in support roles with a more focused approach to improving the attendance of this core group of pupils. There are some early signs of improvement. It is not clear yet if this is sustained. This remains an area of priority.

2. Improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement, particularly in English, mathematics and science, by:

– ensuring that teachers have high expectations of all pupils, including boys

The targets set for pupils have been increased in order to ensure they are sufficiently challenging. The strategies to achieve these targets are still not secure enough in a minority of lessons because teaching is not effective. Some boys in particular continue to under-achieve.

– making sure that teachers plan tasks that match pupils' starting points sharply, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

School leaders have provided regular training for staff on this aspect of their work. In most lessons activities are planned well to meet the needs of groups of pupils. In a significant minority of lessons expectations are too low and tend to be aimed towards the pupils with lower skills and experience. In some cases insufficient account is taken of prior learning.

– helping pupils to develop a love of reading that supports their access to and engagement with the wider curriculum

School leaders have started to make this a priority and have introduced 'Thinking Reading' in order to secure further improvement. The expectations for the teaching of reading and writing across the school are still inconsistent.

– ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make good progress in English and mathematics

These pupils are currently not making good progress. This is a key priority.

– making sure that teachers use assessment information to identify and support pupils who are at risk of falling behind.

Leaders have provided additional training and support for staff in order to improve their awareness and skills in this area. Staff understand that this is a priority and most have begun to improve their use of assessment, especially in relation to examination criteria. Other aspects of assessment and feedback, such as formative assessment and questioning, are still relatively weak.

3. An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The governing body was replaced by an Interim Executive Board, making this action inappropriate.

4. 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.

A review has been planned for January 2018. The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is still a key priority for improvement.

Other relevant information

- Many improvements are recent, fragile or reliant on external capacity.
- The school experienced a significant staff re-structure in the summer of 2017. This process was handled rapidly and enabled the school to start in September with a settled and relatively stable staff.
- A provisional, in principle, agreement has been reached for a sponsor to take on responsibility for the school
- The school has experienced significant changes in leadership with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and business manager all having left in a relatively short period of time. The arrangements for the current headteacher are interim. The IEB has been in place for a relatively short space of time. The IEB has provided focus support for school and helped to tackle some key barriers to improvement
- The re-structuring has meant that the budget has been managed effectively and the school anticipates a balanced in-year budget for 2017/18.
- Oxfordshire local authority has taken played a strong role in resolving a structural deficit for this Foundation school.
- Provisional invalidated progress data for 2017 shows above average progress or English, average for maths and below average for a range of other subjects (including science).

Suggested further actions

This is a school that is showing the early signs of improvement. Leaders have taken decisive action to address the significant weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Some aspects of staffing and leadership are fragile.

Leaders should:

- Update the school web site so that it meets requirements for information that should be published.
- Continue to review, check and develop actions required to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- Continue to provide support and training for staff so that a greater proportion of lessons provide more interest and engagement, higher expectations, greater pace and challenge
- Continue to focus on improving leadership at all levels so the school focuses less on intervention and more effectively on providing quality-first teaching
- Begin to focus the school's resources, actions and attention to Key Stage 3 in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of its school improvement strategies
- Improve consistency of behaviour management, expectations and support for staff in how to engage boys positively

- Continue to improve the attendance of all pupils and ensure that those who currently have low attendance (especially some who are disadvantaged and/or those with special educational needs) attend more regularly
- Continue to develop the skills, experience and capacity of middle leaders so they are able to drive the necessary improvement within their subject areas
- Improve the teaching of reading and writing across subject areas

Summary of surveys completed for the review

Staff survey – 19 responses

1. I am proud to be a member of staff at this school.

Strongly agree 5
Agree 12
Disagree 2
Strongly disagree 0

2. Children are safe at this school.

Strongly agree 3
Agree 15
Disagree 1
Strongly disagree 0

3. Behaviour is good in this school.

Strongly agree 0
Agree 10
Disagree 7
Strongly disagree 2

4. The behaviour of pupils is consistently well managed.

Strongly agree 0
Agree 6
Disagree 11
Strongly disagree 2

5. The school deals with any cases of bullying effectively (bullying includes persistent name-calling, cyber, racist and homophobic bullying).

Strongly agree 3
Agree 15
Disagree 0
Strongly disagree 1

6. Leaders do all they can to improve teaching.

Strongly agree 2
Agree 13
Disagree 4
Strongly disagree 0

7. The school makes appropriate provision for my professional development.

Strongly agree 1
Agree 10
Disagree 6
Strongly disagree 2

8. The school successfully meets the differing needs of individual pupils.

Strongly agree 1
Agree 9
Disagree 8
Strongly disagree 1

9. I know what we are trying to achieve as a school.

Strongly agree 5
Agree 13
Disagree 1
Strongly disagree 0

10. All staff consistently apply school policies.

Strongly agree 0
Agree 11
Disagree 8
Strongly disagree 0

11. The school is well led and managed.

Strongly agree 0
Agree 15
Disagree 3
Strongly disagree 1

Pupil survey 94 responses

1. How well does the school help me to learn?

very well 36
Quite well 46
Fairly well 12
Not very well 0

2. How well do teachers support me with my work?

very well 38
Quite well 43
Fairly well 13
Not very well 0

3. How well do you think the school has improved since you have been here?

very well 41
Quite well 42
Fairly well 7
Not very well 4

4. What is behaviour like at the school?

Very good 5
Good 51
OK 28
Not good 7

5. I feel safe at this school.

All of the time 53
Most of the time 36
Some of the time 4
Rarely 0

6. I feel confident that a member of staff would help me if I had a problem.

Yes 86

No 7

7. I have no concerns about bullying - either verbal or physical.

I agree 74

I disagree 19