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24 January 2013

Mrs Bev Bell  
Interim principal  
The Basildon Upper Academy  
Wickford Avenue  
Basildon  
Essex  
SS13 3HL

Dear Mrs Bell

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Basildon Upper Academy**

Following my visit (with Janet Pearce Her Majesty's Inspector) to your academy on 22–23 January 2013, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 14 March 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly-qualified teachers before discussing it with me.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012**

- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form by:
  - providing a curriculum that captures students' interest and imagination
  - ensuring that students are taught to synthesise information from a variety of sources and to write their responses in their own words
  - ensuring that students are taught to use and apply mathematics to real-life situations to further their understanding of the concepts and skills being learnt
  - ensuring that students receive regular and specific guidance on how to improve their work
  - ensuring that students build up and take responsibility for compiling a coherent record of their learning and progress
  - ensuring that sixth-form students are adequately prepared for the courses they take.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of independent work that students can complete in each lesson
  - using the most effective teachers, and external support if necessary, to work with colleagues to help them devise interesting, enjoyable and challenging lessons that hold students' attention
  - requiring teachers to plan explicitly to meet the needs of students working at three or more different National Curriculum levels in lessons
  - ensuring that all teachers understand the benefits of checking students' progress as they work in order to assess their understanding and to ensure that all are being continuously challenged
  - providing rigorous and specific monitoring to identify improvements needed, backed up by bespoke advice and professional development to enable each teacher to raise the quality of their teaching.
  
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
  - increasing attendance and reducing persistent absence rates as a matter of urgency, particularly among disabled students and those who have special educational needs, so that they are much closer to the national average
  - reducing the reliance on sanctions by finding more constructive approaches to securing and sustaining good behaviour
  - developing a clear programme to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through lessons, tutor periods and extra-curricular opportunities
  - giving students a greater say in voicing their ideas for improving the running of the academy
  - implementing a stronger programme of anti-bullying measures so that racist and homophobic bullying is eliminated

- identifying and addressing the reasons why some students do not feel safe in the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - strengthening the Academy Trust's capacity for educational leadership, for example, through strategic partnerships
  - increasing leadership capacity, for example, by forming partnerships to provide effective support and guidance for senior and middle leaders
  - completing the restructuring of leadership roles to provide clear lines of accountability, particularly in relation to disabled students and those who have special educational needs
  - developing a stronger role for subject leaders in improving teaching and learning, ensuring that each group of subjects has a specific development programme
  - making regular checks that agreed procedures are being implemented consistently and challenging staff when inconsistencies occur
  - ensuring that the academy complies with all health and safety requirements.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22-23 January 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal, senior leaders, middle leaders, groups of pupils and staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a staff governor, and held a telephone conversation with the Department for Education academies adviser.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the principal and a vice-principal have left. The head of sixth form has resigned but is still in post. Currently there is an interim principal leading the academy, who began work in late November. A monitoring visit has taken place from Department for Education advisers from the academies unit.

### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Students' achievement is similar to that reported at the previous monitoring inspection. There has been a strong focus on ensuring students attain a grade C in both English and mathematics. As a result, the academy continues to demonstrate improvement in increasing the proportion of students gaining a grade C in English and mathematics. The emphasis is on attaining these grades rather than on making the progress that might be expected, resulting in too few students gaining high grades. Similarly, the amount of time spent on these subjects, including additional interventions beyond normal lesson time, detracts from students' achievement in other subjects.

Students' progress is monitored through regular testing but, especially in the sixth form, this information has not been sufficiently robust or reliable. Students in the sixth form are underachieving because of a lack of subject specialists. This needs to be addressed urgently.

### **The quality of teaching**

Improvements in teaching observed in the previous monitoring inspection have been sustained, but the pace of improvement has not been rapid enough. There is still too much teaching that requires improvement, mainly because teachers' expectations about how much students can achieve in a lesson are too low.

Teachers are making more use of varied teaching approaches such as the use of mini whiteboards, group work and evaluating each other's work to increase student engagement and interest. For example, in a lesson where students made good progress, students gathered together at the end of the lesson to evaluate the shading, tone and texture they had included in their drawings. This opportunity

enabled students to improve their confidence through sharing their best work and talking about their skills.

Where teaching still requires improvement, teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for students to deepen their understanding and explore ideas or topics. In more successful and improving lessons, teachers allow time for students to ask questions and take time to explain answers really clearly so that students gain more confidence. In these lessons teachers are encouraging students to aim higher and achieve better grades.

Lesson planning is showing more consistency with some clear and useful guiding principles such as what 'all, most, and some' students should achieve as a structure for the learning objectives and outcomes. However, in some lessons this places limitations on students' aspirations and they are still only prepared to complete 'just enough' work to achieve the lowest target set.

There is more evidence that teachers are prepared to adjust their teaching to meet the needs and abilities of the students in the class, such as revising or repeating key learning when students have not made sufficient progress previously, but this is not consistent across the academy.

Teachers' marking and written feedback has maintained its improvement since the previous monitoring inspection, but there are still subjects and classes where marking is not good enough and students do not receive enough information about what they need to do to improve their work.

Students report that they feel that some teaching has improved because the teachers push them more and expect them to work harder. This is largely because the behaviour management systems have enabled lessons to move at a better pace, with fewer interruptions to learning. Students also appreciate the additional help they receive and more students attend extra sessions after school.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The improvements in behaviour and safety noted in the previous monitoring inspection have been maintained. Attendance is much better than it was, but is still not good enough. Students told inspectors that behaviour has continued to improve as everyone has got used to the new systems. They continue to conduct themselves maturely in social spaces and to demonstrate that they have good relationships with each other and with members of staff. The central atrium provides an excellent business-like social space where students and adults mix together in a relaxed environment. Teachers create a purposeful culture for learning and behaviour when teaching is good.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

The pace of progress evident in the previous monitoring inspection has not been maintained. Following the departure of the former principal, governors took advice on the best way forward to secure leadership and recruited the interim principal. The academy was without a principal for two weeks at a critical time. Leadership was not sufficiently distributed to the senior leadership team, so there was considerable slowing of improvement. Senior leaders have not acted as a coherent team. There is a lack of clear lines of accountability. The interim principal is changing the structure of senior leadership to bring greater clarity to the responsibilities. She is respected by staff, brings experience of successful leadership of school improvement and is aware of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement, including those of managers. She has an astute understanding of what needs to be done but it is too soon to assess her impact.

Governors meet regularly, but there is conflicting evidence about how effectively they carry out their role. Beyond the Chair of the Governing Body, there is little evidence of governors' visiting and checking the work of the academy. There is conflicting evidence regarding how well governors have monitored the academy. The outcome is that the governing body has been insufficiently informed and involved in the strategic direction of the academy. A lack of communication regarding the departure of the previous principal and uncertainty about strategic planning has led to a fall in morale amongst staff and students.

The academy has continued to work effectively to improve the work of an identified group of teachers, but just as stated in the report following the previous monitoring inspection, has yet to implement a consistent professional development programme to raise the quality of teaching for all staff. Similarly, just as reported previously, performance management processes are at an early stage of development and have yet to make a difference for most teachers. Since the previous visit, a programme to improve the teaching of middle leaders has been successfully established and several middle leaders are now driving improvements in their faculty. The art department is an area where the shared good practice is having a positive effect. There have been opportunities for teachers to share expertise and coach each other, which have resulted in some improvement, but this has not been strategic and opportunities for all teachers to benefit from each other's skills are not consistent. Academy leaders have not been sufficiently focused on improving teaching as the top priority. As a consequence, improvements in teaching are patchy and students do not benefit across all subjects.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, when the sixth form was moving forward well, it has become an area for great concern. The departure of staff has left courses without specialist teachers and the revelation in the press that the head of sixth form has resigned has caused consternation amongst students.

Senior leaders are drawing up plans to improve the Key Stage 4 curriculum from next September. Changes made to the leadership and management of alternative provision for students who attend courses and programmes off-site have resulted in improvement. More links have been made with appropriate course providers and also with parents, so that students' attendance and progress have improved. Academy leaders can point to many individual students who not only have made a great success of a work placement or vocational course off-site, but who have also improved their attendance, behaviour and progress in their courses at the academy. The academy is confident that no students in the current cohort will leave their secondary education with no employment or further training. There is a need to pay more attention to improving skills in reading, writing, spoken communication and numeracy for students who attend courses off-site.

### **External support**

The improving teaching programme provided by Billericay School is beginning to have a positive impact. An external consultant with a background as an accredited Ofsted inspector is working with the academy to develop the quality of teaching. The local authority continues to work closely with leaders of teaching to spread good practice further.

### **Priorities for further improvement, as discussed:**

- urgently address issues in the sixth form related to future leadership, the robustness of assessment information, and ensuring that subjects are taught by suitably qualified teachers with the expertise to teach the subject to GCE level
- arrange an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved. (The academy should contact the National College via [governance.review@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:governance.review@nationalcollege.gsi.gov.uk), to request a review of governance).