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Mrs Bev Bell
Interim Principal
The Basildon Lower Academy
Timberlog Close
Timberlog Lane
Basildon
SS14 1UX

Dear Mrs Bell

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Basildon Lower Academy

Following my visit with Simon Hughes and Jenny Carpenter, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 25 and 26 April 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I am of the opinion that the academy is now able to support the appointment of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), at its own discretion.

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, the Academies Advisers Unit of the DfE and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement across the academy by:
 - implementing a systematic programme to teach literacy and numeracy skills to those students who have significant shortfalls in their reading, writing and mathematics attainment
 - increasing managers' and teachers' understanding of how to use assessment data to plan learning and raise achievement
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessments and regular verbal and written feedback on their progress inform students of how well they are doing
 - setting clear personal targets for students and ensuring they are understood and used to raise aspirations and track their progress.

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially that of basic skills, so that it is good by:
 - implementing a clear, coherent plan for improving teaching, based on high expectations and the steadfast commitment of all staff to raise the achievement of all learners
 - providing students with activities that stimulate their interest and enjoyment
 - ensuring teachers' planning includes activities suited to students' different abilities and which enable students to work independently, in pairs and in groups
 - using the information gained from lesson monitoring to tailor specific training and support for teachers, and measuring the impact this has on the quality of provision and students' learning
 - enabling the best teachers to show others what good teaching is and mentor teachers to increase their effectiveness.

- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
 - checking that all teachers apply behaviour management procedures consistently in all lessons
 - ensuring that progressively fewer students are removed from lessons and those that are receive appropriate and timely support which meets their needs and secures their progress

- ensuring that the new procedures to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence focus closely on disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - significantly reducing the number of students excluded from the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
- articulating a clear vision for the academy and sharing it with all teachers, leaders and managers, students, and their parents and carers to gain their full support and commitment to securing long-term improvements
 - holding all staff to account by measuring the impact of teaching and the actions to improve it on students' learning
 - clearly defining the roles and expectations of all pastoral and academic leaders and managers in raising achievement and regularly checking that they are demonstrating the capacity to secure improvements
 - requiring governors to set the highest expectations of senior leaders and managers, and rigorously managing their performance to raise students' achievement
 - improving the effectiveness of communication systems within the academy and between staff, parents and carers so that important information is shared efficiently and in a timely fashion
 - strengthening the Academy Trust's capacity for educational leadership.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 April 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, including 20 lesson observations, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the interim Principal, nominated senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, and three representatives of the governing body.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured. The most significant changes include the appointment of a Head of School for the Lower Academy, and an Executive Team that operates across both Upper and Lower Academies.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academy is working hard to foster a culture of aspiration where high achievement is celebrated and valued, and is not something to be embarrassed about. Systematic assessment, four times a year, is beginning to change pupils' attitudes because they can see their improvements and most are motivated to achieve their targets. Results from these assessments indicate that achievement continues to rise steadily. The majority of pupils are making secure progress in English and mathematics and their progress in science is also accelerating. Evidence from pupils' work and from lesson observations shows a more variable picture: pupils make rapid gains when teaching is lively and engaging. All pupils made good progress in a Year 9 science lesson because the work on electrical circuits was challenging, but cleverly planned and expertly directed with probing questioning. By contrast, pupils made limited progress when teachers' planning was weak or when the management of pupil behaviour was not strong enough.

The academy has introduced a range of initiatives to extend its gifted and talented pupils. During the visit, for example, some of the more-able pupils were variously working with an author, an illustrator, and on a national mathematics challenge. These are positive developments because they stimulate the pupils' creativity and help to build their self-esteem. Assessment information is generally well used to plan work and to set targets for pupils, but these are not always high enough. Too often in lessons there is insufficient challenge for the most-able pupils, either because the planned outcomes are not ambitious or because the pace of learning is too slow.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve with many of the academy's young and inexperienced teachers now confidently delivering good lessons. However, this is not

always the case. Teachers' expectations were not high enough in the weaker lessons, either because they did not demand enough of the pupils in terms of difficulty or effort, or because they sometimes ignored unacceptable behaviour. Teaching assistants help to keep pupils on task in these lessons, but they sometimes spend their time cajoling pupils to behave well rather than supporting their learning. The best teaching sets the bar at the right height for different pupils and is also carefully planned and skilfully managed, so that pupils are on task from start to finish. In a Year 9 physical education lesson, the boys rose to the challenge of the Fosbury Flop: they were so sharply focused on their high-jump technique, and getting it right for the video replay and analysis, that there was no opportunity to drift off-task.

Improving marking has been a key priority since the last monitoring visit, and the impact of this work is already evident because pupils know exactly where their work can be improved.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The previous monitoring report noted the academy's calm and orderly climate, and this remains the case. Positive comments from visitors, including parents of prospective pupils, attest to the settled climate for learning across the academy, and the vast improvements made over the last 12 months. The pupils' developing pride and self-confidence was evident, both in lessons and when they took the opportunity to speak to inspectors. Behaviour was good in the majority of lessons observed during the visit, but despite continued improvement good behaviour and positive attitudes are not yet the norm across the academy. Pupils are encouraged to take more responsibility around the academy and for their own learning in lessons. For example, they routinely check their own progress against their targets and are expected to respond to specific guidance given in marking. However, too often they do not work hard enough in lessons. This is sometimes because they lack the confidence to contribute ideas, but on other occasions pupils are too chatty and talk over one another and the teacher. Their banter when working in small groups is sometimes disrespectful and disruptive.

The academy's interventions and support programmes are having the desired effect on its exclusion and absence figures. Attendance continues to improve, and levels of persistent absenteeism are declining. There have been no fixed-term exclusions since the start of March.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring visit, the interim Principal has skilfully steered the work of the academy and driven improvement with clear focus and impressive energy. Leadership capacity has been strengthened by sensibly delegating responsibility to key senior and middle leaders, an approach that has also benefited governors, who

are given timely and detailed information in order to play their part in strategic decision-making. Governors' monitoring visits, for example in English, mathematics and science, have provided the governing body with first-hand information so that they can confirm or challenge, as necessary, what they are being told. The academy's strategic plan has been rewritten, at the request of the governing body, and the governors' insistence that the timetable is completed early for next year means that plans are well advanced for the introduction of new Key Stage 3 subjects in September.

Senior and middle leaders are balancing well the need to support and challenge staff. Teachers are encouraged to share their ideas and are more accustomed to being observed, so that observations are seen as constructive. The academy can point to several cases where personalised support has improved the effectiveness of individual teachers. Leaders are also beginning to make much sharper use of assessment data to measure the effectiveness of the academy's work. As well as checking the progress of pupils and effectiveness of specific interventions, the information is also used to review the performance of teachers.

External support

The academy sensibly seeks external support where necessary and draws on the experience of other schools wherever this is seen as beneficial. For example, the local authority has provided helpful training and has conducted a critically evaluative SEN review (provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs); local schools have also helpfully moderated the academy's assessments in English and mathematics.