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Bev Bell
Interim Principal
The Basildon Upper Academy
Wickford Avenue
Basildon
SS13 3HL

Dear Mrs Bell

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Basildon Upper Academy

Following my visit (with Gill Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Paul O'Shea and Frances Le Pla, Additional Inspectors) to your academy on 25–26 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. The academy may appoint a small number of newly qualified teachers. The principal should contact me before making any such appointments to discuss the number and the subject.

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.

Special measures: monitoring of The Basildon Upper Academy

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, reviewed documents and met with the interim principal, senior leaders, middle leaders, groups of students and staff, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, a new head of sixth form has begun work. The senior leadership team has been restructured.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement continues to improve. The use of early entry to GCSE examinations has provided reliable evidence of improved attainment for the current Year 11 students in both English and mathematics. Students make good progress in the majority of lessons. In lessons where this is not the case, students do not always make as much progress as they could because teachers' expectations of what they can achieve remain too low. Part of the reason for this is that although teachers have been given information about the target grades for the students in their class, these target grades are too often insufficiently demanding. For example, many students have a target grade at GCSE of C when their Key Stage 2 test results suggest they are capable of much better. The academy argues that this reflects previous underachievement at Key Stage 3, but as pointed out in the last monitoring letter, in addition to increasing the proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, the proportion of students making at least expected progress from the end of Year 6 to the end of Year 11 must increase.

In the last monitoring inspection students in the sixth form were underachieving because of a lack of subject specialists. This has improved through moving some existing staff and making new appointments. Further appointments to resolve the issue are imminent.

The quality of teaching

The academy has now established a whole-school approach to monitoring lessons and training staff on effective teaching skills. This was requested in the last two monitoring inspection reports, and is now routine. It is already having an impact, as seen in the increased proportion of good lessons. Around two thirds of lessons are

now good. Examples of the positive impact of training were seen in lessons where teachers asked probing questions to help students develop their thinking. Teachers listen to what students say and encourage them to share their ideas. Teachers demonstrate an appropriate knowledge and understanding of examination requirements, and use this to help students. There is some good practice in developing students' literacy skills, with a focus on the development of subject-specific vocabulary.

Teachers work very hard. In fact teachers often work too hard in lessons and, despite the improvements outlined above, do not give students sufficient opportunities to develop their thinking through activities such as group work and independent learning. Sometimes teachers talk for too long, so students have insufficient time to complete tasks. At other times, teachers do not explain clearly what is required from the task set. Lesson planning has improved, but insufficient attention is given to how the lesson will be adapted to enable different ability groups to make progress. Within lesson plans there is too much emphasis on what the teacher will do, rather than on the learning that will take place.

Marking has improved. Students like the new stickers with feedback and targets. The quality of the comments varies between teachers and subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is good. Relationships between staff and students are now good and this engenders a positive attitude to learning. Students who would previously have received a fixed-term exclusion are now being placed in the new 'lynx centre' where they do productive work to improve their learning and behaviour. Attendance has improved but remains too low. Attendance panels have been introduced and the academy is working hard to reduce persistent absences.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership and management of the academy have improved markedly since the last monitoring visit. Lines of accountability are now crystal clear. The academy has still to appoint a permanent principal but a head of the upper academy is in post and assisting the interim principal in driving improvements. The interim principal has empowered senior leaders and has used her experience effectively to coach and train senior leaders. She assures the quality of their work. She has also worked with governors to increase their effectiveness, by giving them information that enables them to fulfil their role of challenging the academy. Governors are more visible around the school than before, and much more aware of the academy's strengths and areas for development.

The timetable has been transformed so that students now have regular lessons in English, mathematics and science without the long gaps of several days that existed at the time of the last monitoring visit. An effective system to monitor and improve the performance of all staff is now established. A series of faculty reviews is underway, greatly strengthening the impact of the academy's own evaluation of its performance. Leaders make better use of data to review the performance of subjects and teachers, but the targets set for students are not yet sufficiently challenging.

External support

The academy is making good use of external support. Teachers are participating in improvement programmes provided by a national leader of education at Billericay School. The local authority works effectively with this academy. In addition to monitoring the academy's progress, it is assisting with leadership training while supporting and contributing to the whole-school training on teaching and learning.