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Mr Malcolm Shaw
Headteacher
The Willows School Academy Trust
Stipularis Drive
Hayes
Middlesex
UB4 9QB

Dear Mr Shaw

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Willows School Academy Trust

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 2014, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2013. 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Education Funding Agency, the Director of Children's Services for Hillingdon and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or better and none is inadequate by ensuring teachers:
 - set tasks at the right level for pupils
 - demand more work and better presentation from them
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to work actively with others.

- As a priority, ensure that the site is secure and pupils are always supervised so that no pupil is able to leave unnoticed.

- Involve pupils in assessing and checking their own learning by making sure:
 - marking tells pupils how to improve, and pupils have the chance to take action in response to it
 - targets are used better, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

- Improve pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy by:
 - helping pupils to extend their range of vocabulary and teaching them how to structure sentences
 - making sure teachers correct pupils' errors in spelling and punctuation
 - ensuring that reading skills are taught systematically throughout the school
 - improving teachers' mathematical knowledge, and helping pupils practise their skills by solving more real-life mathematical problems.

- Improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring:
 - staff consistently challenge poor behaviour before it escalates, using agreed procedures
 - the topics and activities of the curriculum are more interesting and engaging.

- Ensure that leaders and managers:
 - have clear roles and responsibilities
 - gather accurate data on pupils' progress and behaviour, and analyse it to be clear about how well different groups are doing, identify priorities and rigorously check plans are working
 - assess the quality of teaching accurately, taking into account the impact teaching is having on pupils' progress, and follow up improvement points teachers are given
 - base targets for teachers' performance and any pay increases on improvements in the quality of teaching.

Make sure governors use accurate data and sound evidence effectively to hold senior leaders and staff accountable for the school's performance.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17 June 2014

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the leaders responsible for assessment, and the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor. A telephone conversation was held with the School Improvement Partner. All classes were jointly observed with the headteacher. Pupils were observed during lunchtime and spoken to informally throughout the visit.

Context

There have been no staff changes since the last monitoring inspection. The governing body has appointed three new members to fill existing vacancies.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards of achievement are rising throughout the school. Teachers have increasingly high expectations and most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning. Leaders are now confident that teachers are able to accurately assess how well pupils are achieving and can recognise when any gaps in learning need to be closed. As a result, more pupils are making progress towards individual targets pitched at the correct level. Current assessment information shows that all pupils have made at least the expected rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics this year. Some pupils have made accelerated progress from starting points established in September.

Progress across subjects and year groups is still uneven. Older pupils are now making more progress than their younger peers. Some older pupils are making more rapid progress from low starting points because of better teaching which is helping them to close gaps in their understanding. A strong focus on writing this year has led to more regular opportunities for pupils to write for extended periods. As a result, pupils write more confidently, check their work for mistakes and recognise when further improvements can be made. Further opportunities to develop reading and numeracy skills are being planned as part of wider curriculum changes next year and remain areas for improvement.

The school is tracking the achievement of vulnerable or minority groups more closely. Pupils eligible for the additional pupil premium funding, including looked after children, do as well as other pupils at the school. Comparisons with how well these pupils achieve compared to similar pupils nationally are not considered but leaders and governors are working to address this.

The quality of teaching

Greater staff stability, regular monitoring and targeted support are ensuring that the quality of teaching continues to improve. All staff, including teaching assistants, share high expectations and work as a team so that the needs of individuals can be met and interruptions to learning are kept to a minimum. The small team of teachers work closely together, sharing good practice and expertise. Classrooms are attractive and well resourced with pupils' work proudly displayed. The quality of work in pupils' books reflects the higher expectations of staff. Pupils present their work neatly and are proud to share what they have achieved with others.

Teachers plan activities that engage pupils in their learning. They use assessment information to set tasks that are at the correct level for each pupil, taking account of the wide ability and age range within their classes. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to work together so that their social skills are developed alongside other learning. As a result, most pupils stay on task for extended periods of time and achieve their targets. When pupils lose concentration, this is quickly recognised and the pace of learning is adjusted. The number of occasions when pupils need to be withdrawn from the classroom because of poor attitudes to learning has reduced significantly this term.

The marking policy is consistently applied and teachers provide regular feedback to help pupils identify the next steps to take to improve their work. All teachers correct spelling, punctuation and grammar errors to help pupils improve their written work. However, some pupils continue to make unnecessary mistakes because they are not always given time to respond to the comments made by their teachers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The consistent approach to managing behaviour, evident at the last monitoring inspection, has been maintained. Pupils have accepted that everyone has higher expectations of them and behaviour is improving quickly. Staff are skilled at recognising when pupils need extra help to manage their behaviour, and intervene quickly and without fuss. This ensures that serious incidents are usually avoided and learning can continue with few interruptions. Pupils are encouraged to be polite and considerate of each other and increasingly copy the behaviours they see modelled by adults. Their behaviour in the playground is managed safely by staff who lead team games and supervise the safe use of play equipment. External boundaries are secure and pupils are appropriately supervised at all times.

There have been no exclusions this year and attendance is continuing to improve for most pupils. Attendance this term is over 92%, which is a significant improvement, although still below the national average. Parents and carers are encouraged to work closely with staff and other professionals to make improvements when attendance

concerns are identified. Parents' and carers' views are valued and key workers make regular telephone contact to discuss pupils' progress. Most pupils are making good progress towards their behavioural targets and there have been very few interventions requiring physical restraint this term. The reward system is proving to be effective and pupils look forward to spending the points they earn in the school shop at the end of the week.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

School leaders worked with the School Improvement Partner to strengthen the action plans following the last inspection. Plans are regularly reviewed and evaluated by leaders and new priorities agreed. However, the governing body is not monitoring the impact of the action plans closely enough.

The school has efficient systems for monitoring how well all pupils are achieving and leaders are able to judge when pupils' progress is faltering. They are increasingly using this information to agree additional interventions for individuals, groups and classes. However, leaders are not checking that specific actions are leading to improved rates of pupils' progress or setting performance targets for staff that include pupils' progress measures.

Improvements in the quality of teaching have been sustained. Senior leaders understand how teaching over time is judged and link their observations to the quality of work seen in pupils' books and assessment information. They make accurate judgements regarding teaching and learning, and can explain how to make further improvements. Middle leaders are more confident in their roles and this has provided the headteacher with more time to focus on strategic plans for further improvements.

Further changes to the membership of the governing body have been made. New members have recently been recruited with prior experience of governance and useful professional skills. Job descriptions for governors are being written by the Chair of the Governing Body and specific responsibilities agreed so that governors can start to link with school staff to monitor key improvement areas. The governing body has worked hard to ensure that the school's financial situation is more secure and the Chair of the Governing Body is generous with her time and the support she provides to the headteacher. However, continual changes to the governing body have meant it is still not holding school leaders to account as effectively as it should.

Governors have not received sufficient training to help them ask challenging questions or interpret achievement information. The monitoring role of governors is not clearly defined within the school action plans and they are not checking that actions are making a difference to pupils' progress. Governors are not well informed about the systems for managing teachers' performance. Governors are not questioning the information provided to them by school leaders and are over-reliant

on information from the headteacher when judging the current effectiveness of the school. Governors are taking too much time to make decisions about the future of the school and whether or not to join a multi-academy trust (MAT). The capacity and competency of the governing body to drive forward improvements is still a concern that needs to be rapidly addressed.

External support

Governors and school leaders have arranged for regular support to be provided by a School Improvement Partner, which they consider to have been highly effective. He has worked with staff, leaders and governors to address specific areas for improvement identified within the inspection report. Stronger links with the local authority have yet to be achieved but a meeting with local authority officers has been arranged to consider how the school could be supported. For two days a week, leaders and governors continue to be supported by a strategic leader from a local outstanding secondary academy.