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13 November 2014

Mr Andrew Mackereth
Principal
The Parker E-ACT Academy
Ashby Road
Daventry
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Dear Mr Mackereth

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Parker E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with Russell Ayling and Jacqueline Pentlow, Additional Inspectors, and Amanda Carter-Fraser, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 11–12 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint a maximum of three newly qualified teachers, restricted to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive Officer for E-ACT, the DfE Academies' Advisers Unit, the Education Funding Agency, the team inspectors and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Julia Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - have higher expectations of what students can achieve, particularly in their written work
 - use information on students' performance to set work at the right level of difficulty for students, particularly the most-able
 - apply the academy's policies on marking and behaviour management rigorously and consistently.

- Raise the achievement of all groups, especially the most-able students, and particularly in mathematics and science, by:
 - giving students a greater challenge and building on their successes
 - refusing to accept work that is clearly well below students' ability levels
 - marking work regularly and in detail so that students know that their efforts are valued and are able to understand how to make progress
 - preventing the poor behaviour of a minority of students from affecting learning.

- Improve behaviour and safety by ensuring that all teachers, including senior teachers, address low-level disruption and other poor behaviour consistently and rigorously.

- Ensure that leaders and managers increase students' achievement across all year groups, including the sixth form, and raise the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring middle leaders make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and provide effective support for those teachers who need it
 - replacing the current system used for tracking students' progress with one that is fit for purpose.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11–12 November 2014

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new Principal, a senior Vice Principal, a finance director and a new director of post-16 have started work at the academy. Seven new teachers in English, mathematics, science, geography and French have also been recruited to replace those that have left. There are two temporary teachers covering geography and information and communication technology. Among the support staff, a new librarian, a data manager, two cleaners and a teaching assistant have started work at the academy. In September, a new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed from the existing governors, alongside three new governors.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2014, GCSE results met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment. However, the results were disappointing and represented a decline from 2013. The progress of students in both mathematics and science was well below national expectations. Progress that students made in English was in line with national expectations, although those exceeding expected progress was below national figures. There was a widening gap between the progress for those students eligible for the pupil premium and others. The most-able students did not make the progress that they should, in English, science or mathematics. The Principal leads on the learning and progress of these students and has ensured that they are identified accurately and that the curriculum is designed to cater for their abilities. He acknowledges that there is more to do in raising the achievement of all students, including the most able.

Leaders are aware that previous teachers' assessments of students' progress were not reliable. Current Year 11 assessments remain overgenerous. Systems of quality assurance are now in place to ensure that this information is moderated, both internally and externally. School leaders now set aspirational targets for all students.

Achievement at post-16 remains a concern. In 2014, AS results were well below national expectations, and, as a result, four students are retaking all of their examinations. Over half the students did not continue their education into Year 13. A recent review of post-16, commissioned by E-ACT, confirms that post-16 achievement is inadequate. School leaders acknowledge that there were a number of issues contributing to this decline, including staff absence. Since the last monitoring visit, a rigorous staff absence procedure has been introduced, and staff attendance has improved as a result. Until recently, performance of post-16 students was not routinely monitored. The new head of sixth form has a clear strategy to address this, including external verification of teachers' assessments. She has also

ensured that students are enrolled on suitable courses and has revised the entry requirements for the next academic year. All students are now following appropriate study programmes. The school continues to work in partnership with DSLV E-ACT Academy to ensure that Year 13 students can continue with the courses that they started last year.

The quality of teaching

The Principal has rightly prioritised strategies for improving teaching. School leaders have introduced a number of appropriate systems, including a well thought-out learning and teaching policy and a carefully constructed system to assure the quality of teaching. This has been made possible with the support of two large professional associations of teachers, who enabled the Principal to make the changes necessary to drive rapid improvement.

Teachers' expectations are not always high enough and poor-quality written work is deemed acceptable across a number of subjects. In mathematics, too much time is spent consolidating prior learning for some students at the expense of others, particularly the most able. Incomplete work was seen in science and this had not been addressed effectively. As a result, some students' work does not reflect their ability levels. The new data system provides teachers with a wealth of information about their students. However, not all teachers use this new data effectively to plan their teaching. Consequently, the full impact of the new system on driving up rates of progress, in all classes, is not yet evident. In geography, there is a culture of high expectations and learning is celebrated. In one lesson, students discussed the siting of a new football stadium and evaluated the resulting costs and benefits extremely well. These students were highly engaged and developed a secure understanding of geographical terms.

The quality of teachers' marking is an integral part of the school's new quality assurance procedures. A recent marking scrutiny, undertaken by school leaders, indicates that there are more examples where the most-able students are given appropriate advice to stretch and challenge them. Marking remains inconsistent, but there is a notable improvement as more teachers are applying the marking policy and all work is now marked. The advice given by teachers varies in quality. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not corrected routinely. Inspectors saw very few examples where students had responded to marking by completing additional work to demonstrate their learning. Teachers make increasing use of peer- and self-assessment, but this is rarely checked by teachers.

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. However, there is evidence that recent professional development and the support of learning coaches have started to have an impact on the quality of teaching over time, particularly for established staff. For example, recent training on effective questioning is translating into

appropriate practice in the classroom, including efforts to tailor questions for the most-able students.

Post-16 teachers were not sufficiently experienced in delivering advanced level courses. These teachers have been involved in visits to good post-16 providers and have received coaching support to address this. Students say that there is a notable improvement in the quality of teaching that they receive. Post-16 teachers are now focusing on A-level assessment criteria in their teaching. Post-16 students are more focused in lessons and they have a clearer understanding of expectations for examinations. Teachers' marking and assessment are linked to the same assessment objectives but is not yet consistent.

Staff and students say that behaviour in classes is improving and this has led to better student engagement. Staff no longer use students' behaviour as a reason for not learning. They recognise that positive attitudes to learning are demonstrated through a number of means, including resilience, co-operation, collaboration, resourcefulness and independence. There is still some low-level disruption, and students do not always respond immediately to teachers' instructions. This limits the progress that all students make. Teachers take increasing responsibility for the behaviour of students in their classes and this is tracked carefully. This information enables leaders to determine if further behaviour support needs to be put in place.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is real clarity and certainty in the school community that the new Principal will not tolerate poor behaviour. A new behaviour policy has been introduced, supported by appropriate staff training. The policy has a simpler system for sanctions and rewards. There is a clear distinction between conduct and learning behaviour; this is helpful to staff in separating issues of students' conduct from their attitudes to learning. As a result, all teachers, including senior leaders, are applying the policy more consistently.

Students are well managed by staff around the school site, despite its geographical challenges. Incidents of swearing were previously commonplace in the classroom. They are now dealt with severely and there has been a sharp decrease in these incidents. Leaders have provided appropriate training to all staff in e-safety. Incidents of bullying, including cyber-bullying, are recorded diligently. Students say that they feel safe and know who to go to for advice if they need it.

The Remembrance Day silence took place during break time. Without exception, all students were highly respectful of this and, as such, demonstrated their commitment to both the Principal's request and the promotion of British values.

The school's child protection and safeguarding policy has been updated in line with the latest guidance issued by the government. Referrals made to external agencies

are appropriate and timely. Leaders are vigilant in addressing concerns regarding lengthy absences.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new Principal is credited with bringing a singularity of direction to the school, supported by an ethos of optimism and support. Staff say that the atmosphere is now very different; they feel valued and empowered. There is a greater clarity of expectations for both students and staff. Both staff and students say that sports day was a pivotal moment for the school. It served to establish a cohesive school community and reinforce the new Principal's message about unity, strength and endeavour. Since commencing work in June, the Principal has taken a number of carefully calculated decisions, including the introduction of both vertical tutoring and a house system. Despite initial opposition from staff, both of these initiatives are working effectively. As a result, both staff and students are highly committed to the new vision and ethos. The Principal has made some appropriate, minor adjustments to the school improvement plan to reflect his new vision. However, measurable success criteria for science and the most able are not yet included in the plan. The plan is used appropriately to monitor and evaluate progress against the priorities.

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has commenced the use of an appropriate data system to track students' progress. The system provides timely management information and school leaders are becoming increasingly proficient at accessing this data and sharing it with other leaders and staff.

Subject leaders, have a growing understanding of their responsibilities, including the responsibility to monitor the quality of teaching and provide support where appropriate. However, there is variability in their effectiveness, and the leadership of mathematics is still developing. They are under no illusion about the scale of the issues affecting their departments, caused by a legacy of inadequate teaching. They are now fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and are supported by senior leaders to become more adept at this. They recognise that, in some subjects, underachievement has been a result of an inappropriate curriculum offer and class-setting decisions that have not been ability-based. These issues have now been addressed.

Performance management systems are now fit for purpose. Performance management is now inextricably linked to professional development, school improvement priorities and raising achievement. Performance targets are specific and all teachers have targets related to the achievement of students eligible for additional funding, students' progress and appropriate professional development. Teachers have an increased awareness of what is expected of them. Staff training is led by the school coaches and is subject to rigorous quality assurance.

The post-16 leader has started to implement a number of effective systems. Sixth form students are no longer allowed to leave the school site during the day and are

expected to continue to study on-site during their non-contact time. This has served to improve attendance in the sixth form.

The original interim executive board has now expanded its membership and a new governing body has been formed as a result. There have been a number of new appointments, including the Chair. A new safeguarding governor, representing E-ACT, has been appointed and has already carried out an effective review of safeguarding procedures. Governors are still learning about their new role and are also attending the Raising Attainment Board meetings in order to accelerate their understanding of school issues. They are well aware of the inadequacies in achievement, but have not been established for long enough to provide sufficient challenge to leaders. At present, there is a lack of clarity with regard to the delineation of responsibilities between the governing body and the sponsor.

A review of the use of the pupil premium funding had taken place prior to the last inspection, and the recommendations are starting to be implemented. The external review of governance that was recommended at the last inspection will now take place in January when the new governing body is more established.

External support

The support provided by the sponsor, E-ACT, has previously lacked challenge and coordination. Some systems that are imposed by E-ACT have served to limit the effectiveness of leaders to concentrate on areas that will lead to rapid school improvement. Plans have been drawn up to commission support to validate teachers' assessment decisions in English and mathematics.