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30 January 2015

Heidi Brown  
Principal  
Bexhill High School  
Down Road  
Bexhill-on-Sea  
TN39 4BY

Dear Ms Brown

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Bexhill High School**

Following my visit with David Webster, Additional Inspector, and Jackie Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 January 2015, 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 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.

The academy may 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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013**

- Improve teaching considerably, so that by the summer of 2014, attainment at GCSE is broadly average and that, in the year between March 2013 and April 2014, at least an average proportion of students in Key Stage 3 make the expected progress, by:
  - increasing the pace and challenge in each lesson
  - raising teachers' expectations of what students can and should achieve
  - ensuring all students are given work which precisely matches their assessed needs
  - improving the marking of students' work, so that it provides guidance which helps students to improve their work more quickly
  - not accepting work which is poorly presented.
- Enhance the curriculum, ensuring that the current interest and breadth in the curriculum are not lost by:
  - closely addressing students' needs in literacy and numeracy right from the start of Year 7
  - making sure the curriculum for Key Stage 3 students is appropriately planned, preparing them well for Key Stage 4
  - making sure that learning in Year 9 is more productive and used effectively to prepare students for the next phase of their education.
- Extend significantly the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
  - ensuring the senior leadership team has the capacity and necessary expertise to bring about the improvements needed, particularly in the key areas of teaching and the curriculum
  - holding middle leaders to account much more closely for the quality of provision and students' progress in their areas of responsibility
  - managing more robustly the school's work with disabled students, those with special educational needs and those supported by pupil premium funding, and checking carefully the impact of this work on the students concerned
  - evaluating the work of the school accurately, more regularly and in greater detail
  - sharpening school improvement planning
  - making sure that the monitoring of teaching focuses on the impact it is having on the progress students make and helps each individual teacher to improve, even where lessons are taught by more than one teacher
  - ensuring that teachers' assessments of students, and the school's data used to track students' progress, are well moderated, accurate and reliable
  - improving the effectiveness of the performance management of staff
  - undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 January 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other senior staff and middle leaders, the Chair of the Trust Board, groups of students and groups of teachers. The academy's record of the checks on staff suitability to work with young people was examined. A telephone discussion was held with an official from the Department for Education.

### **Context**

On 1 December 2014, Attwood Academies Foundation took over the sponsorship of the academy from Prospects Academies Trust. A new Principal joined at the start of September, as did two new Vice-Principals and a business director. Six staff left the academy at the end of the autumn term. Two have been permanently replaced and the remaining four are covered by eight long-term supply staff. For September, temporary partitions were installed in the academy's large teaching spaces to break them into smaller units, and the timings of the academy day were changed to give five one-hour lessons each day.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Results in the summer 2014 examinations reflected similar overall student progress to that seen in 2013, which was an improvement on 2012 when the academy was placed in special measures. However, the challenging targets set for students were missed, there was too much fluctuation between subjects, with weaker progress from their starting points in the academy in English, and too little acceleration in progress overall. This year-group of students had begun to make better progress, but it was too late to make up lost ground caused by the poor learning environment and a lack of good teaching in the past.

Current students are benefitting from a better organised curriculum and enjoying the shorter, more focused sessions. The academy has done much to ensure assessment is accurate, and there is evidence of progress gaining momentum over time in Key Stages 3 and 4. All of these students too are tackling a legacy of poor past achievement, reflected in inconsistent progress in different subjects and between different groups. Disadvantaged students are rightly receiving particular attention, since the gap between their attainment and that of others remains significant. Staff at all levels are much more aware now of where students are, and where they need to get to. Students talk positively about extra support given to help them catch up.

Temporary changes to the teaching spaces mean students are now taught in smaller classes, and this is helping them make better progress. Students were unanimous in saying the new arrangements help them focus better and get on with their work. But

they rightly note that on too many occasions, learning is hindered by the sound of the group working next door, which cuts across class discussion and/or teachers' questioning of students. This is frustrating for students and is slowing them down.

### **The quality of teaching**

More accurate assessment of students' attainment and targets, alongside more manageable group sizes, is supporting better teaching. A larger number of teachers are planning work which is challenging for the class, making better use of techniques such as questioning to check progress and using a better range of activities to sustain students' interest. Improved marking reflects the impact of a revised policy. The deployment of additional adults is more effective, due to improved guidance for them about the needs of the students they are supporting. Nevertheless, these improvements are not universal, notably in the work of the temporary staff. Marking does not consistently adhere to the academy's expectations, particularly in giving guidance for improvement. The quality of discussion in lessons remains too low overall, with teachers too often missing opportunities to extend students' ideas.

The divided teaching spaces offer some welcome separation between classes and enable teachers to focus on, and be responsible for, the progress students make. The more successful teachers adapt sensibly to the constraints of the temporary screening, for example by carefully positioning class discussions. These staff also keep noise down so neighbouring groups can learn. In too many lessons, the situation is not managed well enough by teachers so their students cannot hear instructions or discussion properly.

The school is making good use of the larger number of teaching spaces to allocate students to groups by ability. This is helping ensure work is at the correct level of challenge. While some staff are adept at ensuring the work in lessons is tailored to meet students' differing needs, teaching is too frequently aimed at the average ability in the group, so work is too easy for some and too hard for others.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students are largely keen to come to school and attendance has continued to improve. Focused work with those who regularly miss school is reducing the numbers affected. The academy uses a good balance of sanctions and rewards to encourage good attendance. Most but not all students are punctual to lessons.

Behaviour is largely calm and orderly around the site, and students are welcoming to visitors. Relations between students and staff are positive. The revised timings of the school day, while preferred by students, mean all are on lunch-break at the same time. This in turn means social spaces are crowded, and inspectors witnessed some jostling and thoughtless behaviour.

The majority of lessons are unimpeded by disruptive behaviour, with most students arriving ready to learn, and sustaining their focus even when it is difficult to hear. There is some low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons, exacerbated by the teaching spaces, where any disruption is likely to affect more than one class.

The newly introduced tutor times have the potential to aid students' academic and social development, with some offering good opportunities for discussion or activities such as reading. Others are not planned well, and teachers' expectations are not clear enough for the time to be productive.

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

The Principal is working well with her senior team, who are showing determination to accelerate the pace of improvement. They have taken decisive steps to improve the way staff performance is managed, using an improved assessment system to ensure all, including themselves, are accountable for students' progress. Leadership structures have been revised to give better oversight of performance in key areas of the school's work and in subjects, and further revisions are planned. Adaptations to the building are a sensible stop-gap in the light of the need to improve students' progress, but significant change is required for a long-term solution.

It is good to see that middle leaders now have targets relating to students' progress. Curriculum leaders are more able to hold staff in their subject areas to account, and year leaders are being challenged to improve outcomes for their year-group as a whole, and for specific groups of students who are furthest behind.

Staff development is well focused on addressing cross-academy teaching priorities, as well as those of individual staff. This work is making a positive impact and leaders have not been afraid to take appropriate action where staff have not responded to support. Nevertheless, there needs to be a greater focus on enabling staff to manage the current learning environment so that students make better progress.

Leaders have adjusted the Key Stage 3 curriculum to enable discrete teaching of subjects, and a better balance between subjects. Good steps have been taken to improve literacy and numeracy support for older students on vocational programmes. Half-termly literacy focus areas for younger students are helping develop their skills.

The leadership of special educational needs provision has seen further improvement through using the assessment system more effectively to monitor students' progress and to target support. These efforts are now better coordinated with year leaders, and linked to better training for teaching assistants, who were observed to be making more impact in lessons than previously.

The Trust Board has met once since taking over the academy and includes people with suitable skills to hold academy leaders to account. The Board has begun to monitor leaders' impact on teaching and progress, but much attention is being paid to reviewing the future of the building. This included calling a halt to the planned changes for last summer, based on a new analysis of their cost-benefit. A further set of reviews of the building were commissioned by the Chair of the Trust ahead of the change in sponsorship. These are now being reviewed by the Department for Education, and include changes to the boiler system chimney.

### **External support**

The Principal is taking the right steps to make links with other local schools, although this work is at an early stage. It has involved moderating assessments of students' work with another school, and starting to work with a local Teaching School to support the development of teaching in the academy.