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Special measures monitoring inspection of Tabor Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 24 February 2015 with John Lucas HMI, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the vice principal, three senior leaders supporting the academy, three middle leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a representative of the academy sponsor and a representative of the local authority. The sponsor's statement of action/ academy action plan was evaluated. Safeguarding and other documentation were reviewed. Short visits were made to twelve classes to talk to students and staff while at work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection the substantive principal has left the academy. A vice principal has been in the role of acting principal for twelve days. An interim executive board (IEB) has replaced the local governing body. Staff, parents and carers have been informed that academy sponsorship will transfer to a new sponsor from Easter 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The recent appointment of acting principal has brought some stability to leadership and management for staff, students, parents and carers during a period of uncertainty. The continuing support of the local authority and academy sponsor is helping to follow-up the section 5 inspection within this context. However, although the academy's action plan has stimulated some improvement it is unsuitable in its present form as a basis for the removal of special measures.

The academy's plan does not set high enough targets for students' achievement. For example, the expected progress of Year 10 students is below that achieved by their peers nationally even though this cohort did equally well when tested at primary school. The starting points and targets set for different groups of students are not clear enough to know if they are catching up. This includes disadvantaged students who reached the expected level in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 but who, in 2014, made significantly less progress than their peers. Similarly, targets for disabled students and those with special educational needs are not precise enough. Supplementary plans such as the pupil premium plan require similar amendment.

The system of tracking students' progress is better than at the time of the inspection. More regular and reliable assessment is helping to identify earlier, students who are doing well and those who require additional support. The most successful teachers are using assessment information to plan lessons that meet students' differing needs. Nevertheless, effective use of assessment information in the classroom is far from common. Senior, middle leaders and other staff do not make close enough links between students' achievement and the quality of teaching. This is also a feature of the academy's action plan, monitoring records of teaching and the expectations of teaching issued to staff.

The expectation that 60% of teaching will be good or outstanding by April is too modest. Students, parents and carers were informed by school leaders that this was already the standard at the time of the inspection in November. A range of training and coaching is being provided by senior leaders and stronger teachers to improve the quality of teaching. However, students' inconsistent responses to teachers' feedback and marking indicate that weaknesses in teaching are proving slow to improve. While students are positive that relationships in the classroom are better than at the time of the inspection, they commented that it is too early to say that teaching has improved. Nevertheless, the classes visited by inspectors indicate that the academy's strategy to promote positive attitudes to learning is working.

Improving the behaviour of students, judged to require improvement, does not feature strongly enough in the academy's plans. Although senior leaders plan to seek

the views of students regularly, the astuteness of students when asked to evaluate their learning, indicate their involvement in the academy's improvements should be strengthened. Similarly, while parents and carers are informed about the academy's plans they have not been given enough guidance about ways of supporting their child to do well. There is currently no parent or carer representative on the IEB. Recent messages of support from parents and carers have strengthened senior leaders' resolve to work with parents and carers in order to secure improvements.

The important role of middle leaders in improvement does not feature strongly enough in the academy's plans. The lack of targets for subjects other than English, mathematics and science is a contributory factor. Although senior leaders have rightly altered the curriculum to increase students' chances of success, it is not clear how the quality and delivery of the curriculum in different subjects will be assured. An external review of the use of the pupil premium also draws attention to weaknesses in managing intervention. However, there are positive examples of leadership support developing. For example, in mathematics, a local authority review, support from a specialist in the trust and a visit to a high-performing department in another school, show how different resources can be managed efficiently to support the academy's improvement.

An external review of governance commissioned by the academy sponsor refers to the transition of the IEB into a new governing body, a recommendation given added importance since the transfer of sponsorship announced since the review. The academy's plans should show how governance will increase the involvement of a wider range of interested parties in order to hold leaders and managers to account. In the early stages the IEB included the local authority and a representative of an outstanding school locally.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:
The sponsor's current statement of action/academy action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State