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Rachel Swaffield
Headteacher
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Vandyke Road
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Bedfordshire
LU7 3FU

Dear Mrs Swaffield

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gilbert Inglefield Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 22 May 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and also with six governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and with the mathematics subject leader and the deputy headteacher. The proprietor's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Immediately after the inspection, a new Chair of the Governing Body was elected, following the resignation of the previous Chair. Although only one new governor has been appointed since January, five governors were newly elected at the time of the inspection, and have since taken up their roles. Three governor vacancies remain.

An external review of governance was completed in February and a review of the academy's use of pupil premium was undertaken in March.

The head of mathematics took up post in January, a week before the inspection. Since the inspection, three mathematics teachers have resigned and a second in mathematics has been appointed, to start in September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school improvement plan has been adapted to include actions that address the three key priorities from the inspection report. Key performance indicators outline some broad targets for each priority, but the plan lacks measurable criteria against which its successful implementation can be gauged. Without a target date for the academy's removal from special measures, or interim milestones for summative evaluation, it is unclear to leaders and governors whether the academy's recovery is sufficiently rapid. The plan makes no distinction between monitoring and evaluation, and although governors are linked to the plan, it is not clear how, when or by whom the impact of planned improvements is being evaluated or corroborated. The mathematics improvement plan is also imprecise and fails to adequately address the achievement of two key groups: disadvantaged pupils and the most able. Without more sharply focused plans, it is not possible to robustly review the impact of the academy's work.

Although senior leaders and governors still feel somewhat bruised and frustrated by the outcomes of the inspection, they accept that the report has highlighted the right priorities for improvement. However, as headteacher you are also acutely aware that the academy's development must be driven across a much wider front because many aspects of its everyday work require improvement. Since September, you have worked tirelessly and with considerable tenacity to raise expectations, restructure and strengthen senior leadership, and improve the everyday work of staff. You have had to lead and undertake much of this work yourself, which has been very onerous.

The academy has used external consultants, including a National Leader of Education, to review its work and planning. However, it has yet to draw on extensive external support to strengthen teaching, learning or leadership. The external review of governance has been particularly useful. The academy has had no report from the external review of its use of pupil premium but it has drawn up a plan of action on the basis of the review.

The governing body has been transformed since the inspection. The external review of governance has sharpened its work, giving governors a much clearer understanding of their strategic responsibilities and their monitoring role, and how to

develop these. The energy and willingness of new governors have been galvanised and channelled to provide essential support and challenge that was previously lacking. Governors' monitoring has been greatly extended through regular visits, suitably guided by agreed protocols and a model of conduct. Communication with parents is also much improved. Training has given governors confidence to ask questions and to challenge leaders with more self-assurance, and a recent skills audit has highlighted possible gaps when recruiting new governors. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors are asking challenging questions. However, governors are not yet in a position to hold senior leaders to account for progress in implementing improvements because of shortcomings in the school improvement plan and statement of action. Reviewing the academy's progress does not feature prominently enough on the agenda or minutes of governing body meetings.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The proprietor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The lead inspector