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Mrs E Robinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Tabor Academy

Following my visit withCarolynn Lowery and Brenda Watson, Ofsted Inspectors, to your academy on 24 and 25 November 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex and as below.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and raise standards across the academy by making sure that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of all groups of students, and that these expectations are translated into effective classroom practice
 - planned teaching activities lead to rapid progress
 - advice to students on how to improve their work is clear and they are given the opportunity to act on it
 - all teachers provide for the needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - teachers are aware of the needs of disadvantaged students in their classes and of the extra resources that are available to support them.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - reducing the excessive changes of teacher that lead to poor experiences for students
 - ensuring that the assessment of students' progress is accurate and is used effectively to aid teaching
 - making sure that policies on marking, literacy, numeracy and behaviour management are clear to all staff and that they are applied consistently across the academy
 - improving communication with parents so that they have confidence in the leadership of the academy

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. An external review of 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 third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and held meetings with the Chief Executive of the Loxford Trust, the headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of teachers and teaching assistants, members of the trust, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in June 2015, a new deputy headteacher, with responsibility for Key Stage 3, has joined the academy. There are acting curriculum team leaders in modern foreign languages and science. Appointments have been made to the posts of deputy curriculum team leaders in science and in mathematics. A new head of art began in October 2015, and a head of religious education will join the academy in January 2016. In addition, 20 teachers have joined the academy as part of the drive to fill vacancies previously occupied by temporary staff. The interim executive board (IEB) has been replaced with a local governing body which met for the first time on 5 November 2015.

Outcomes for pupils

The 2015 examination results indicate that standards have risen, yet remain below national averages. Pupils made stronger progress in English, but less than that of which they were capable in mathematics. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those with disabilities or have special educational needs made considerably less progress than their peers. Too few pupils made above-expected progress in English and in mathematics.

Much work is being done to improve outcomes, and evidence seen on this inspection indicates that standards are continuing to rise. The proportion of pupils on track to attain five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics in 2016 is higher than the national average set in 2015.

Disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress in English, where gaps in achievement with their peers in school and nationally are closing quickly as a result of improved teaching. In mathematics, pupils have a lot of ground to make up due to the legacy of poor and disrupted teaching. As a result, gaps are closing more slowly and remain too wide in comparison with their peers in school and nationally. Leaders are aware of this and are taking decisive action to enable pupils to catch up through the provision of after-school, holiday- and tutor-time mathematics sessions. These are appreciated by pupils, who are making better progress as a result.

Pupils are making stronger progress across Key Stage 3. Gaps in achievement are closing, although again, this is slower in mathematics than in other subjects across the curriculum.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils told inspectors that there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching across many subjects. The evidence seen during the inspection supports their view. Teaching is improving, but the quality still remains too variable.

Leaders have ensured that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Individual targets are higher and pupils understand that more is expected of them. Many teachers are becoming more skilled at using assessment information to plan lessons that interest pupils. More able pupils and those who are disadvantaged are making stronger progress because teachers are more frequently providing them with appropriate, challenging activities. While the strongest examples of this are seen in most English and history lessons, teachers in other subjects are not consistently making skilful use of assessment information to ensure pupils of all abilities achieve higher levels of progress. For example, pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs are too often required to use resources and complete tasks that have not been modified to meet their needs. This is limiting the progress that they are able to make.

Teaching in mathematics has improved but there is considerable variability in the level of challenge in current lessons. This is why pupils are not making up the ground that is needed quickly enough. The inconsistency in the quality of teaching in science remains a concern for academy leaders and governors, and rightly so.

Teachers' feedback is generally more effective than at the time of the last monitoring visit. Pupils are able to learn from their mistakes and develop higher order skills as a result. For example, learners in a Year 11 English lesson made strong progress when developing their analysis of *Of Mice and Men* as a result of the perceptive feedback provided by their teacher. This best practice is not commonplace across all subjects. Feedback can lack the clarity needed to enable pupils to develop stronger subject-specific skills. Pupils explained that they are not always given the time to improve their work and, in the words of one pupil, 'Sometimes we don't know how to respond'. Evidence seen in several lessons as well as in a scrutiny of pupils' books confirms this to be the case.

Questioning often lacks the depth needed to stimulate deeper understanding and greater progress. Too often, teachers move on too quickly, missing opportunities to extend pupils' thinking. Where practice is strong, pupils respond with enthusiasm and resilience. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, skilful questioning by the teacher helped pupils to use more ambitious language when writing a formal letter. These pupils spoke with pride about the progress that they were making.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Academy leaders are maintaining their unrelenting focus on developing the highest standards of behaviour. They have successfully built upon the effective actions noted during the last monitoring visit, and are deploying resources to manage behaviour very well. Leaders, including achievement team leaders, have a high profile around the academy site and are frequent visitors to lessons. They have established a climate in which good behaviour and learning are valued by the majority. Relationships are typically respectful and good humoured. There is an absence of the tension previously felt around the academy. Pupils told inspectors that they can learn without fear of repeated disruption to many lessons. As one pupil commented, 'It is calmer and I can learn'.

The large majority of pupils are displaying much improved attitudes to learning and have responded very well to the higher expectations of their behaviour placed upon them. They are punctual to lessons and are keen to take part in learning, where it is well matched to their needs. In the words of one pupil, 'They have made me care about my future'. However, a minority of pupils have not responded quickly and positively to these higher expectations and exclusions have risen in the past six months and are higher than they should be.

During lessons, where the work is not pitched at the correct level, for example in some science and modern foreign language lessons, a minority of pupils become uninterested and can challenge the positive attitudes of others. While most teachers are better skilled at addressing this behaviour, some teachers are still over-reliant on the fact that were poor behaviour to occur, leaders will come to their assistance during the lesson.

Pupils are keen to explain that they now enjoy school, feel safe and appreciate the work being carried out by school leaders. They report that the boisterous behaviour previously seen on the corridors, whilst not eradicated, is far less commonplace than at the time of the previous monitoring visit. Pupils found it hard to recall any incidents of bullying and have faith that were they to occur, they would be dealt with swiftly.

Leaders monitor attendance systematically. Attendance is currently not high enough and needs to improve. Information provided during this inspection indicates that absence is above national averages, as is persistent absence. Pupils with special educational needs attend less well than their peers, as do those who are disadvantaged. Pupils who are looked after have attendance considerably higher than that of their peers.

Leaders have acted swiftly to address the gaps in pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. A detailed programme of activities, including daily personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons, is providing pupils with opportunities to be more reflective and to prepare for life in modern Britain. This programme needs to be more closely monitored to make sure that all tutors are following the scheme of work.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have continued to drive forward improvements at a pace and have prioritised with remarkable clarity. The senior team has a common sense of purpose and is tireless in its efforts to improve the quality of education at the academy. Clearer job descriptions for these leaders have cemented the high expectations and clarified roles and responsibilities. This has further increased the capacity of leaders to effect change.

Leaders continue to embed necessary structures and systems, raise aspirations and increase levels of accountability whilst maintaining the high morale noted on the previous monitoring inspection. The highly respected headteacher and her senior team continue to model the high expectations that they demand of others.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of temporary teachers working at the academy. Leaders, including members of the trust, have worked with considerable success to recruit teachers. Pupils appreciate the fact that they have far fewer changes of teacher, and they consider this to be a significant factor in the improved teaching they are experiencing. However, the large number of teachers who have recently arrived at the academy and the impending departure of four others mean that the improvements undertaken remain fragile and have not had the full impact that leaders would like them to have.

New policies, such as the academy-wide approaches to feedback, assessment and literacy, have been in place since September. These are clearly understood, but inconsistently applied. This is due in part to the fact that teachers who are new are not fully familiar with the ethos and policies of the academy. Where these policies are being effectively applied, they are having a positive impact on the pace of pupils' progress.

Leaders have remodelled the curriculum to align it more closely with the capabilities and needs of the pupils. Staff and pupils are highly appreciative of this. It has breadth and balance and is enriched by a wide range of clubs, which one pupil described as 'amazing'. Early indications are that this is having a marked impact on the improved behaviour and improving standards seen in the academy.

Curriculum leaders have an increasingly accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in their subject areas. They appreciate the comprehensive monitoring calendar that is in place and are more empowered to carry out their roles. One curriculum leader commented that 'I know that my judgement is valued', a view which is shared by her colleagues. They are also being held more robustly to account for the standards across their curriculum areas. Several curriculum leaders are not confident in their use of academy data systems and are keen to develop their skills in this area. In some subjects, assessment information paints too optimistic a picture of pupils' performance and needs adjustment by senior leaders. Curriculum leaders and teachers rightly identified the need for training that is better suited to individual requirements.

Appropriate plans are in place to develop the leadership of special educational needs. This work needs to be accelerated. Leaders in this area do not routinely evaluate the patterns of progress made by pupils who have special educational needs across the academy. This is limiting their effectiveness in improving the quality of teaching and, therefore, the outcomes for these pupils. Similarly, leaders need to develop a clearer overall understanding of the progress of the more-able pupils so that they can identify trends in achievement and intervene more rapidly.

A local governing body has replaced the IEB. This governing body, which has a parent governor as its Chair, met for the first time on 5 November. Governors have communicated their clear ambition for the academy. They are already holding leaders to account through careful monitoring of the statement of action developed by the IEB. Leaders, including governors, have yet to explore formally the views of parents as to the effectiveness of the actions taken by the academy to improve the quality of education.

External support

The Loxford Trust continues to provide support for academy teachers and leaders. This support has been more sharply focused on areas of most need since the last inspection report. For example, the directors of science and of special educational needs work with academy colleagues to improve practice. Lead teachers from other academies in the Loxford Trust continue to carry out effective work in the academy, both where there is weakness in teaching and where there is an absence of a teacher.

The local authority provides appropriate challenge to the academy through regular visits and membership of the local governing body.