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Mohsen Ojja
Principal
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Dear Mr Ojja

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Crest Academy

Following my visit with Her Majesty's Inspectors Vanessa Ward and Helen Matthews to your academy on 1 and 2 December 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 and your staff made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. 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 academy is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that newly qualified teachers should only be appointed to curriculum areas where strong support for professional development can be assured and following discussion with HMI.

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 Local Governing Body, the Director for Education at E-ACT and the Director of Children's Services for Brent.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Acting Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching and so raise students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, across Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what both boys and girls can achieve
 - teachers bring more precision to their lesson planning to meet students' differing learning needs and abilities
 - teachers' skills in checking students' learning during lessons and adjusting their teaching accordingly are improved
 - teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge and skills are developed to support subject and English language learning for the many students who are learning to speak English as an additional language
 - teachers consistently provide students with effective guidance about how to improve their work and that students are supported to respond to teachers' written feedback.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - developing the knowledge and skills of all middle leaders to improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of monitoring students' achievement
 - developing and implementing a whole-academy approach to promoting literacy, reading and numeracy
 - evaluating the current arrangements for boys' and girls' teaching and use academy facilities at key stages 3 and 4 to maximise curriculum breadth, and to ensure opportunities for social interaction and equality of opportunity are promoted fully
 - developing the roles of local governors to form an effective local governing body that is able to support and challenge academy leaders to secure the necessary improvements.

The planned external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and assessment information and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, teaching staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Local Governing Body. In addition, inspectors met with the Director of Education from the academy's sponsors, E-ACT. Documents and reviews by E-ACT were evaluated. Inspectors observed parts of 38 lessons and all were jointly observed with senior or middle leaders from the academy. Two assemblies were observed. An inspector reviewed the academy's staff appointment procedures, in particular the single central register. This included a telephone discussion with the E-ACT system leader for safeguarding. The provision for pupils learning English as a second language was reviewed. There were too few responses on Parent View to take account of parents' views. This inspection did not focus on the whole-academy approach to promoting literacy, reading and numeracy.

Context

In September the boys' and girls' academies were integrated and most classes are now taught in mixed-sex groups. The exception to this are a few subjects in Year 11 where option arrangements do not allow for mixed classes. This major development at the academy followed wide consultation with parents, pupils and staff. In preparation for this change, a focused programme for the pupils took place during the summer and at the beginning of this autumn term. In addition, 29 teaching staff joined the academy including three assistant vice-principals and six lead practitioners. However, there remain supply teachers working in some curriculum areas including mathematics, science, design and technology and geography. A vice-principal is currently seconded to another E-ACT academy in the Midlands.

Outcomes for pupils

A comparison with trends over time for achievement is complex as previously data were compiled for the boys' and girls' academies separately. However, the outcomes in 2015 are significantly stronger than the aggregated outcomes for 2014 used for the last section 5 inspection. The GCSE results for 2015 show a clear improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics. This has been achieved by the focused intervention programmes for Year 11 pupils during the spring and summer terms in 2015. The improved outcomes were accurately predicted by senior leaders. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, remains significantly below the national figure.

The percentage of pupils in Year 11 who made at least expected progress in English, taking their starting points into account, was greater than the national figure. A similar profile is seen for the proportion of pupils who made greater than expected progress. The picture for mathematics is not as strong. In terms of the percentage of pupils making expected progress in this subject, the 2015 outcome is below the national figure. The picture is better for the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress.

Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress in English compared with other pupils within Crest and nationally. In mathematics this group of pupils make similar progress to others in the academy but this is below the national average. Overall, mathematics continues to have a weaker profile for attainment and progress measures.

The academy's progress tracking information shows that boys do not achieve as well as girls. This was reinforced by the first-hand evidence from observations during the monitoring inspection. Senior leaders are aware of this and are developing focused programmes, for example developing reading skills, to improve boys' achievement. In addition, E-ACT staff are working with the academy to develop further the scope of data systems to support swift intervention where underachievement is detected.

In the sixth form, the proportion of learners gaining two or more A levels at grades A to E improved in 2015 and is broadly in line with the national figure. However, further evaluation by academy leaders shows that, overall, outcomes are variable because historically a significant number of learners have been entered on inappropriate courses. The academy's leadership is addressing this legacy of poor guidance for learners and course requirements are now more robust and clear.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There has been a strong focus on the development of the requirements for effective teaching through, for example, the 'Crest essentials'. Senior and middle leaders are aware of inconsistencies in teaching both across and within subjects. A range of systems and structures are in place including fortnightly assessments, 'book looks', co-planning, peer assessments and seating plans but there remains variability in practice within subjects and there is a need to reinforce the most effective practice. The promotion of improved teaching and learning is the responsibility of a vice-principal and assistant vice-principal who administer a clear monitoring and support system which is understood by leaders and teachers. Further focused support is developed through individualised work led by lead practitioners in English, mathematics, science and humanities. This work has been effective in improving a legacy of weaker teaching and underachievement in the boys' academy. However, the appointment of the large number of new staff means that there is still more work to do to ensure that there is consistent practice throughout the academy.

Recruitment and retention remains an issue for some subjects, for example mathematics, although senior leaders, rightly, have the highest expectations for recruits at all levels.

The change to teaching mixed-sex groups has been successful. Pupils and staff report that there have been no issues with this. However, there is a legacy of poorer attitudes to learning by some older boys. There are well understood systems in place to deal with poor behaviour, with clear support from senior and middle leaders.

There is a clear marking policy in the academy which includes the requirement for pupils to respond to the written challenges set for them. However, this is not consistently applied across or within subjects. In addition, the presentation of work in pupils' books varies considerably. Some is excellent, such as in religious education and science, but in other subjects the presentation of work is poor.

In the sixth form the quality of teachers' planning is variable, with the best plans enabling learners to be challenged and make strong progress based on their knowledge, understanding and skills. Some particularly effective work was seen in the sciences during observations. In the stronger lessons teachers displayed effective subject knowledge and asked challenging questions enabling learners to explain and refine their thinking.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

It is clear that behaviour has improved since the last inspection. Pupils and staff confirm that the academy is generally an orderly environment. Pupils feel safe and cared for by adults. They understand the rules for working in a community and the consequences of poor attitudes or behaviour. Nevertheless, during the inspection there was an instance of poor attitudes to learning by older boys observed during an intervention session. During the inspection there were also examples of litter being left around the academy after break and lunchtime. In addition, there was some boisterous behaviour in corridors or communal areas at break and lunchtimes.

Both boys and girls are positive about their integration together across the academy. They report that they enjoy working in the mixed-sex groups and that this has not caused any issues for them. This is confirmed by inspection evidence.

In lessons, behaviour is usually positive and effective relationships ensure that pupils are able to consider sensitive issues in a mature manner. Pupils noted that with more permanent staff in place, better relationships could be established which improves their engagement and achievement. However, the quality of behaviour is almost always linked to the extent that teachers are able to engage pupils in their learning and match activities to pupils' abilities and skills. For example, in a Year 7 drama lesson the very effective engagement with pupils and the well-matched activities enabled them to work effectively in groups developing a storyline on the

theme 'Damsels and Heroes'. As a result, the pupils made clear progress in their skills, gained in confidence and thoroughly enjoyed the session.

Sixth form learners are appreciative of the level of support that is now in place for their guidance and support. They noted that this was now a clear priority for leaders.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal is well regarded by pupils and staff and has continued the drive for improvement seen at the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders continue to be effective models for improvement and have a good understanding of their roles and accountabilities. Pupils and staff thoroughly understand the Principal's '1, 98 and 100%' rule.

Leaders were accurate in their predictions for GCSE outcomes in 2015. In addition, they are highly accurate in their evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning across the academy. A range of information including outcome data and observations of teaching is used to gauge the quality of learning across the academy. The accuracy of this is confirmed by the extensive range of joint observations with inspectors during the inspection. Leaders analyse progress measures each half term and use this to develop focused intervention for groups of pupils and for performance management of staff. Following a review by E-ACT, data collection systems are being developed to improve accessibility.

The integration of the boys and girls into teaching groups has led to a broader and more balanced curriculum for all the pupils. Equal opportunities for all pupils are securely established.

The team dedicated to working with pupils who have English as a second language are developing the systems to support teachers. These include 'pen portraits' with advice for individual teachers on personalised approaches for pupils. However, systems have not been in place long enough to demonstrate a consistent impact on achievement.

Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. All staff have been trained in the identification of pupils who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism.

The leader of the sixth form was appointed in September. He has already made a significant impact on the development of systems and structures to support improvement. He has made changes in the sixth form centre to ensure adequate areas for independent study and has developed routines which have improved learners' motivation and aspiration.

The Chair of the Local Governing Body has overseen the review of the governance of the academy in July as recommended in the last section 5 report. This review

acknowledged the work of the Chair in building the capacity of the local governing body, which now has a full complement of governors. However, some of the actions set as a result of the review have been postponed and this is acknowledged by the Chair. The sponsor is currently undertaking a review of governance across all of its academies which may affect the structure and working of the local governing body. Any changes need to be completed before the next monitoring inspection in order to ensure that governance meets statutory requirements, develops its strategic role and holds leaders to account.

External support

E-ACT continues to provide effective external support to the academy. This has included a recent review of teaching, learning and the progress made since the last inspection. The main form of challenge from the sponsor continues to be the regular Raising Achievement Board meetings which review outcomes across a range of performance indicators and benchmark these against other academies in the E-ACT group. This term there has been a change in the system leader supporting and challenging the academy. A number of visits have been conducted which have provided good evidence on the quality of teaching and learning across the academy. The Principal appreciates this support and challenge from the system leader. The results of the review of governance by E-ACT in terms of any changes for the academy were not known at the time of the monitoring inspection.