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Mr Ashley Dixon
Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College
Abbs Cross Lane
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Essex
RM12 4YB

Dear Mr Dixon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College

Following my visit to your academy with David Storrie, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 15 and 16 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 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 June 2015.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy is not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

The academy's action plan is not fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

John Lambern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the vice-chair of the governing body, a representative of the academy monitoring board, teachers and pupils. Inspectors visited a number of lessons with leaders. The proprietor's statement of action and the academy's improvement action plans were evaluated. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents and records of meetings provided by the academy. These included policies for safeguarding and the single central record of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The focus of the monitoring visit was on those areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection, relating to safeguarding policies and procedures, and the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Context

The headteacher and executive headteacher left the academy in August 2015 following the section 5 inspection. The new substantive headteacher took up his full-time position in September 2015. To support teaching capacity, a number of supply staff are used.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The new headteacher has set a clear vision and is beginning to establish a culture of higher expectations. He rightly recognises a legacy that has resulted in low outcomes for pupils. The 2015 GCSE results were not strong enough and represented a decline in pupil outcomes from the previous year. Predictions for current Key Stage 4 pupils' outcomes, while showing improvement, are well below the academy's target for 79% to achieve good GCSE grades in both English and mathematics. Leaders have arranged external coaching to support teachers in improving outcomes in mathematics. However, they have not appraised the impact of this work in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

At the time of the section 5 inspection, safeguarding policies and procedures failed to meet statutory requirements. The headteacher has ensured that leaders have taken action to address this area for improvement. Policies have now been sufficiently updated and ratified by the governing body. A range of safeguarding training has been undertaken, both online and face to face. It has included the Prevent strategy, radicalisation and extremism, forced marriage, child sexual exploitation, children missing from education, e-safety, and guidance on the use of medicines. The academy now operates an effective and methodical approach to the procedures for safeguarding. Risk assessments are undertaken with care and referrals are made to external agencies. The academy works well with the police to identify any pupils at risk of harm. However, leaders have not evaluated the impact of safeguarding work or the wider training.

Staff are now aware of their role in promoting pupils' safety, personal development, behaviour and welfare. The academy now maintains a statutory single central record of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. Consequently, I am satisfied that safeguarding is now effective. Leaders now understand that the impact of safeguarding policies should be evaluated so that the implementation is determined. Pupils say that they feel safe and know whom to talk to if they have any concerns.

Leaders recently introduced a system to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It is providing them with information to offer coaching and mentoring support to those teachers requiring improvement in their practice. However, monitoring is not sharply checked for the progress teachers are making at key intervals.

Leaders identified teachers who were not consistently applying the appropriate policies and procedures, despite having received support intervention. Furthermore, they acknowledged assessment practice that, following a recent book scrutiny, presented as a decline in expectations. Leaders are right to be disappointed in their observations of this variation in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Despite leaders introducing a feedback strategy called 'narrowing the gap', assessment information is still not being used robustly enough to ensure that all pupils make progress.

Pupils are aware of the new system of assessment and feedback. However, a number say that their work has declined since the start of the year. Pupils' books are scruffy or contain incomplete work with little teacher feedback in some subjects, particularly in science and some English sets. Leaders scrutinised books with inspectors. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the use of the academy's assessment policy. Leaders recognise that for a high proportion of pupils, a dip in the progress they are making is evident following half term. Consequently, the headteacher's culture of high expectations is not embedded.

The headteacher and his leadership team have a detailed plan for improvement. However, this plan is cumbersome. It does not sharply identify priorities for improvement. As a result, the academy's self-evaluation does not provide effective evaluation of the progress made since the section 5 inspection. The academy's post-inspection action plan was deemed not fit for purpose in October 2015. The plan failed to provide appropriate, relevant and specific actions. The headteacher presented a revised plan for this monitoring visit. However, it fails to include sharp checking and thorough monitoring of those responsible for actions. Furthermore, evaluation of the plan is unclear. Consequently, leaders' actions are not impacting rapidly enough on pupil outcomes.

Governors and the appropriate authority completed a statement of action following the section 5 inspection. Inspectors also deemed this not fit for purpose. I am extremely disappointed by the proprietor's failure to provide the required revised statement of action for this monitoring visit. Furthermore, records of meetings convey a lack of understanding of the governing body to address this matter. Governors say they wish to improve the academy. However, effective actions are not being taken in holding the academy to account by ensuring rapid improvement. At my next monitoring visit, a revised statement of action from the proprietor will be required for evaluation.

A monitoring board, supported by the local authority, has been established to provide governors with external challenge and support. The board is correct in its evaluation that immediate action by the proprietor is required to challenge improvement. Governors say that a number of barriers are preventing them from moving forward in addressing key priorities. Records of meetings confirm that timescales for action are not appropriate. For example, a number of actions from the governing body plan are 'on hold' and others are not in line with the requirements of the monitoring board. The external support from the board is providing appropriate guidance to the governing body. However, governors are not responding sufficiently to the recommendations of the monitoring board. Consequently, the headteacher is not appropriately supported in his ambition to deal effectively with the areas for improvement.