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Mr Pat Rice
Cedar Mount Academy
Gorton Education Village
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Dear Mr Rice

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cedar Mount Academy

Following my visit with Linda Foley, Ofsted inspector, to your school 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 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 April 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is 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 NQTs.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables students to achieve well by ensuring that:
 - work set matches the needs and abilities of all groups of students and is adjusted appropriately if they are not making good progress
 - there are consistently high expectations of what students can achieve
 - all students are engaged in their learning at all times and they are making good progress
 - teachers' marking provides students with subject-specific advice to help them to improve their learning and staff require students to respond to the advice
 - questioning is used skilfully and is appropriately challenging to check the understanding of all students in order to ensure good progress
 - opportunities for students to develop their reading and writing skills in subjects other than English are swiftly developed and students have opportunities to apply their mathematical skills effectively across a range of subjects
 - the work of teaching assistants is checked carefully to ensure they are supporting students in making good progress.

- Improve students' behaviour and safety by developing effective practices to:
 - urgently reduce the number of students absent from the academy, including those regularly absent, so their safety is assured and overall attendance across the academy is at least average
 - make sure all students arrive at the academy and to their classes on time
 - eradicate persistent low-level disruption and instances of misbehaviour so that learning improves
 - ensure that all students take pride in their work
 - ensure the academy's procedures for the management of students' behaviour are consistently applied by all staff.

- Rapidly improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - ensuring governors meet all of their statutory duties
 - ensuring there are effective programmes for the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding that impact well on the behaviour and attitudes of all students
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and improving that which requires improvement

- ensuring continuity of staffing for all students
- developing effective plans for improvement that have sharply focused actions with precise measures of success
- holding teachers and leaders to account through effective performance management
- ensuring that the impact of actions to help disadvantaged students is checked thoroughly to ensure these students are making good progress in all subjects and attend well
- ensuring all leaders, especially subject leaders, focus effectively on the progress and behaviour of all groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs
- making sure all leaders check the quality of teaching accurately and link it securely to students' progress
- ensuring subject leaders take swift action to ensure there is consistent and effective use of academy policies so that students' behaviour and the quality of teaching improve
- developing effectively students' skills in reading, writing and mathematics across a wide range of subjects
- ensuring governors and sponsors hold the academy rigorously to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

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 first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 December 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, members of the school improvement board and representatives from the trust. They observed teaching and learning in Years 7, 8 and 10, focusing on English, mathematics and science, and spoke with teachers following observations. They spent time observing how pupils behaved around the academy during break and lunchtime.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there has been a considerable amount of staff turnover. Eighteen new members of staff joined the academy in September, including new heads of department in English, humanities, physical education, technology and information technology. Senior leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of two new assistant vice principals to lead on behaviour and attendance, and teaching and learning. One vice principal has left the academy.

Outcomes for pupils

The Key Stage 4 outcomes in 2015 were disappointing and below the academy's predictions. For the second year running, this means that the academy has not met the government's current floor standards. The proportion of pupils attaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, and those making expected progress in English, was lower than the previous year. The proportion of pupils who made expected progress in mathematics was higher than in English but it remained below the national figure. The value added scores for mathematics, science, languages and humanities were broadly average.

Senior leaders are now taking a more robust approach to tracking pupils' progress, which they believe provides them with more accurate predictions for the outcomes in 2016. They hold weekly meetings with heads of department, where teachers' assessment information is checked against pupils' work. The Year 11 mock examinations are now being externally marked.

In the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, pupils' progress was hindered by poor attitudes to learning. This was particularly the case in Year 7 and 10 lessons, where behaviour in some classes was so bad that pupils were making no progress at all.

The recently appointed reading coordinator is developing the new library. Key Stage 3 pupils are responding to her strategies for promoting reading for pleasure, with a steady increase in numbers of those joining the library. Senior leaders are now aware that this must include the facility for pupils to take books home with them if this is to genuinely develop their love of reading.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Across the academy, senior leaders judge a third of the teaching to be good or better, which is an improvement on the situation at the start of the year. Of major concern is that over a third of teachers in the academy, at the time of the inspection, are supply staff. These two statistics mean that pupils have a very slim chance of benefiting from consistently high-quality teaching.

In the majority of the lessons observed during the inspection, too much of teachers' time was taken up with them trying to deal with poor behaviour. As a result, inspectors saw little evidence of teachers challenging pupils to make the best possible progress. An exception to this was in a Year 8 mathematics lesson where the teacher's positive relationship with his pupils created a learning environment in which they were enthusiastic and curious. The teacher was challenging them to tackle more difficult tasks. As one pupil, said, 'this is hard, sir', but his encouraging style meant that they made good progress during the lesson.

The current mixed-ability grouping in Year 7 is detrimental to pupils' progress, particularly the most able. In the lessons observed, the whole class was involved in the same activities, which were not sufficiently challenging for able pupils. Low ability pupils are also not receiving the right amount of support in these classes. Senior leaders have accepted this, and plan to reorganise the groups from January.

The work scrutiny, carried out with a senior leader, showed that most teachers are marking frequently. The quality of written feedback is inconsistent, but some teachers are providing pupils with detailed comments about how to improve. However, when teachers do give this advice, too many pupils do not act on it, or attempt any further challenge tasks which have been set. Of most concern is that when this happens, teachers do not pick this up. It is clear from the presentation and quality of pupils' work that teachers' expectations are not high enough. Some pupils' work represented a deterioration, rather than an improvement, over the term.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the delivery and assessment of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are following a skills-based curriculum, and new schemes of work have been written to deliver this effectively in all subjects. Senior

leaders are seeking feedback from parents on whether the way pupils' progress is reported to them is clear and helpful.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have been ineffective in tackling the issue of poor behaviour. Inspectors' own observations, coupled with staff's and pupils' views, indicate that the behaviour management system is not fit for purpose. A clear discrepancy is evident between the policy, what is being recorded and what is actually happening in the academy.

During break, lunchtime and between lessons, too many pupils do not conduct themselves in a calm and mature manner. During a transition between lessons on the mathematics corridor, the inspector observed behaviour which gave great cause for concern. Despite the high number of staff present, Year 7 pupils were barging into classrooms, shouting and fighting. They were blatantly ignoring the staff who were trying to deal with the situation. Key Stage 3 pupils told inspectors that fights are frequent occurrences, at least once a week, outside at break or lunchtime.

The behaviour during lessons is of equal concern, with some pupils reporting that in all their classes, learning is disrupted. Pupils say that teachers do not use the behaviour management system consistently and when it is used, those who are being disruptive 'don't care'. These views are echoed by teachers, several of whom expressed heartfelt comments to the inspectors about how this worrying situation is affecting their teaching. The bravado that many pupils exhibit, for example boasting about how many detentions they have been given and not attended, is clear proof that the system is not working.

As well as pupils not attending detentions, many of them do not see a period of time in the internal exclusion unit as a serious enough consequence for poor behaviour. Indeed, teachers report that some pupils say they would rather be in there than in lessons. The management of the internal exclusion unit is not a high enough priority for senior leaders. Consequently, it is an ineffective strategy for improving behaviour. The senior leader appointed to lead on behaviour has a clear vision for sustained improvement in this area over time, but there is an urgent need for all leaders to take immediate action to tackle this issue swiftly and decisively.

Actions taken to improve attendance and the number of pupils who are persistently absent are beginning to have impact, but senior leaders are aware that there is still a long way to go in this matter. Pupils who arrive late to the academy must now attend a break-time detention, but leaders know that this will only be effective if non-attendees are tracked rigorously.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders are not using their action plan to effectively drive forward improvements at the required rate. The section on impact measures lacks clarity, and some of the points recorded here are simply actions. Senior leaders need a much sharper plan which clearly plots milestones for them to check whether they are as far on the journey of improvement as they need to be. This will help them and the school improvement board to systematically monitor and evaluate their work.

At both a strategic and operational level, senior leaders are not being effective in tackling the worrying issue of very poor behaviour in the academy. This is having a tangible detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Teachers do not feel sufficiently supported by senior leaders in these very challenging circumstances.

The considerable amount of staff turnover means that pupils are not benefiting from consistently high-quality teaching. Senior leaders have taken action to tackle poor performance in teaching and say that the high number of staff on long-term absence is a result of this. Pupils spoken to during the inspection are very concerned about the number of teachers who have left or who are leaving at Christmas. Some Year 11 pupils spoke to the inspectors about how worried they are about how this is affecting them, at this important stage of their education.

The trust's statement of action sets out clearly how they will work with the academy on its journey towards the removal of special measures. The minutes of the monthly school improvement board meetings provide evidence of how they challenge senior and middle leaders. The questions asked and the follow-up actions show that they are focused on the right areas. However, following this monitoring inspection, members of the board now agree that they need to be more proactive in seeing actual evidence of the impact of leaders' actions for themselves.

External support

Specialist leaders in education from the trust's teaching school have provided support in the English, mathematics, science and special educational needs departments. The trust's targeted specialist support team is also supporting individual pupils, groups and providing training for staff.