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Mr Grant Mottram  
Abbey Woods Academy  
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Dear Mr Mottram

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbey Woods Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 20 to 21 January, 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 May 2015.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose, but would benefit from clarity as to how the rapid improvement board will be held to account for implementing the action plan.

The academy's action plan is 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 Rapid Improvement Board, CfBT Schools Trust and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helena Read  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2015**

#### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Urgently ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe, by:
  - collating and maintaining clearance details for all members of staff on a single central record
  - addressing the difficulties around the safety of the site
  - maintaining vigilance to make sure that those areas which are not safe for pupils are not accessible to them.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good in order to accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that:
  - teachers' assessment of pupils' current achievement is accurate from the point of entry to the academy so that they provide work which will stretch all groups of pupils, including the most able
  - teachers develop more skilful use of questioning during lessons so that they can move pupils on or support them further
  - all staff develop high expectations and aspirations for all pupils and increase the opportunities for deepening their understanding across all the subjects studied
  - disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs are identified by all teachers, and supported and stretched with work at appropriate levels of challenge, including in the early years
  - work set to develop the technical understanding of English spelling, punctuation and grammar enables pupils to attain higher standards in writing, in all year groups
  - all pupils are motivated to work hard and to take pride in the presentation in their workbooks
  - the behaviour of pupils is managed effectively and consistently so that it does not disrupt their learning and that of others.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels, the trust and governors by ensuring that:
  - the trust board and governors develop systems to provide them with an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and hold leaders to account for bringing about improvement

- finances and resources to support disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are allocated and monitored effectively
- the recently forged partnership between the interim headteacher, trust primary lead, and trust learning and teaching coach is further strengthened to accelerate pupils' progress
- subject leaders have appropriate training to improve the quality of teaching in their areas and are held accountable for pupil progress in their subject.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years, by:
  - ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments so that appropriate activities are planned for all children
  - ensuring that activities in all lessons stretch pupils of all abilities including the most able and children who are disabled or who have special educational needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

An external review of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2016**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the executive principal, the Chair and other members of the rapid improvement board, CfBT's primary lead, the academy's leaders of English and mathematics and the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector met with pupils formally and informally, as well as observing pupils at break and lunchtimes. Teaching and learning was observed in all classes and the pupils' work in books was reviewed. Informal discussions were conducted with parents. There were insufficient responses to Parent View for these to be considered. A range of documents were scrutinised including the academy's procedures to ensure pupils are safe, information about teaching, learning and assessment, alongside the minutes of governors' meetings. Documents relating to pupils' current progress and attainment, behaviour and attendance were also considered.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, significant changes to leadership and staffing at the academy have taken place. A substantive headteacher was appointed from September 2015 and an executive principal now works with the academy two days a week. The trust have appointed a deputy head with the view to making a substantive appointment later in the year, following the departure of the previous post-holder. Eight new teaching staff have joined. New fencing has made the site much more secure since the last inspection.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

The new leadership team at the academy has inherited a legacy of chronic underachievement. Literacy levels across all year groups are too low. Leaders have rightly recognised the need to build pupils' core skills and are developing a whole-academy approach to phonics. Training for teachers is being provided but it is too soon to judge the impact this is making. There are large gaps to close as a result of historical poor teaching, especially in Years 2, 5 and 6. However, leaders are very aware of these gaps and are determined to improve outcomes for all their pupils. Things are improving. In Year 3, readers were able to use skills to help them read unfamiliar words and showed a sound grasp of the texts they were reading, indicating the progress they have made since the start of the year.

The proportion of pupils in the early years reaching a good level of development is below the national average and is particularly low for boys. An emphasis on more structured learning is beginning to have an impact. For example, Reception pupils were engaged in some ambitious writing work, beginning to form whole sentences.

Standards in Key Stage 1 reading, writing and mathematics are well below the expected standards and indicate a decline from the previous year. There are early signs that this is improving with pupils in Year 2 progressing well in the technical skills in writing. The picture at Key Stage 2 in 2015 was better, with pupils making progress more in line with what is seen nationally. The progress of disadvantaged pupils or those with special educational needs was similar to pupils nationally. Progress of the most-able pupils is below expected and very few pupils in this group received the higher grades in national tests at the end of Year 6.

The information held previously by the academy was judged by the current leaders to be inaccurate or, in the cases of pupils with special educational needs or eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government), incomplete. As a result, the academy tested pupils to provide a baseline to assess their current knowledge and understanding. A new method of assessment is being implemented across the academy. This work is also being checked externally to ensure it is reliable and can be used to hold all staff to account for the progress pupils make. However, as this system is newly established it is not yet possible to evaluate the difference it is making.

The review of pupils' work, for example pupils in Year 6, revealed that while pupils are making up some lost ground they are working at levels below that expected of pupils of this age. Presentation of work is improving with pupils in the older year groups showing more pride in their work and taking more care to present their work neatly.

Pupils were keen to discuss their learning and could give examples of how the academy had taken steps to help them improve their work.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching and learning is improving because clear, higher expectations have been set for teachers and pupils alike. Teachers are beginning to plan better for the needs of pupils with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium. Where teaching is strongest there is a close match between the teacher's planning and information about precisely what a pupil needs to do to improve. Teachers' written feedback to pupils is resulting in progress when the advice is precisely targeted to the pupils' needs and they are having opportunities to respond to the advice in a timely way.

Teachers are planning a more engaging curriculum which is hooking pupils into learning. For example, Year 1 pupils were very focused on problem-solving how to capture an escaped dragon. In Years 4 and 5, pupils were identifying literary techniques to help them develop their own comic strip stories. In mathematics in Year 6, pupils were using practical approaches to help them embed their understanding of fractions. However, not all teachers are making clear links for pupils between the activity they are doing and why they are doing it. As a consequence, not all pupils are making progress at the rate they should. Some teachers do not use opportunities during class time to advance pupils' knowledge or understanding.

There are pockets of stronger practice and leaders are encouraging teachers to plan together and develop their subject knowledge, especially in mathematics and English.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils are friendly and welcoming. The headteacher greets all pupils he meets and pupils respond pleasantly in turn. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the site. Very few examples of low-level disruptive behaviour were seen.

A new behaviour system has been implemented which pupils were all clear about and thought was fair, including the Year 6 pupils who have higher expectations placed on them. Pupils feel that the new system is applied consistently by staff. There have been two recorded incidents of racist slur this year. Pupils conduct themselves sensibly around the site with one class using the time to move between rooms to practise their times tables.

The site is now secure and pupils are delighted to have a field which is fenced and now a safe place to play. With funds raised by the local parent teacher association, Parents of Abbey Woods Academy (PAWs) have purchased play equipment for all the pupils. This is beginning to replace old play equipment and provides valuable additional activities for pupils at break and lunchtime. There is a strong staff presence at break and lunchtimes to help take care of the pupils.

Attendance at the academy is still too low, especially for disadvantaged pupils. This was not well-tracked previously because there were no accurate records being kept. New systems for tracking attendance means that leaders now know which students and groups of students need to be targeted to improve their attendance. It is too early to judge the impact of the new system in improving attendance over time.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

There is a strong working partnership between the headteacher, deputy headteacher and executive principal. They are very clear-sighted about the academy's strengths and weaknesses; they have precisely and accurately evaluated what has to be done and have laid out an ambitious time-frame in which to achieve it. Their complementary skills ensure that leadership is skilfully deployed to support staff, pupils and parents to achieve better outcomes for pupils. As a result, there has been a significant shift towards a positive climate about the academy and its work.

Leaders at the academy have taken decisive and effective action to improve the safety of the site and other key safeguarding measures. A fence now keeps pupils safe from the main road and controls the entrance of cars to the site. Areas of the academy are now secured, for example entry into buildings is now via a keypad. Learners using the adult learning provision on the site are now risk assessed. The academy's single central record is now complete, up to date and appropriately detailed, showing all appropriate checks have been made for adults on the site.

Steps have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning by leaders, starting with an entirely new approach to assessment. Teachers are being trained and the information about pupils' progress is now checked externally to make sure it is accurate. Leaders have set highly ambitious targets for teachers for their pupils' progress. This reflects a new spirit of ambition for the academy's pupils and an intolerance of low standards. There are early indications that this is having an impact on pupils' progress although overall standards are still low.

In the early years, a timely external review has helpfully laid out key improvements. Pupils are now working towards targets to prepare them for transition into Year 1. Information has been independently gathered to give teachers a clear idea about what pupils already know and understand as a starting point for their planning for learning. Teachers can now track pupils' progress readily and target areas for improvement.

Middle leaders have a very clear view of their responsibilities for improving outcomes for pupils at the academy. They are being well supported through mentoring by senior leaders and through external support. Middle leaders are involved in the training of other staff and helping them to develop their practice. It is early days for this work and too soon to see an impact but these leaders have high expectations and a positive determination to improve standards.

All teachers' performance is now managed by senior leaders. Teaching staff have a performance target linked to the progress of all of the pupils in their class. Under the



direction of the deputy headteacher, all teaching assistants have targets that link to pupil progress. This means that the emphasis of their work is now firmly rooted in the progress pupils are making. Teaching assistants are involved in specialist training and are managed directly by a member of the senior team, who holds them to account.

The system for tracking the progress of pupils with special educational needs has been radically overhauled by the special educational needs coordinator. There are clear systems in place to track the progress of the pupils and procedures to help teachers plan for their pupils' learning. It is essential, however, that this work is monitored and evaluated carefully to judge the difference it is making to pupils.

The headteacher has made conspicuous efforts to be seen on the playground at the start of every day, to be approachable and build links with the local community. This is paying dividends as parents now feel more confidence in the academy. Several parents commented on the support the leaders had offered their families. Pride is being restored in the academy.

### **External support**

The trust acted decisively to secure effective leadership of the academy and is offering firm support for the headteacher through the executive principal and the deputy headteacher. The trust's primary lead works closely with the academy and chairs the rapid improvement board.

The trust has also brokered support from the academy's sister school, Meadow Park Academy, for securing safeguarding procedures and improving the safety of the academy site.

The local authority has worked effectively with the academy to secure improvements in the early years and support the development of work in this area.