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Mrs Zoe Bidmead
Principal
Melior Community Academy
Chandos Road
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Dear Mrs Bidmead

Special measures monitoring inspection of Melior Community Academy

Following my visit with Jeremy Haigh, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 March 2016, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school 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 school 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 education advisory board and the sponsor.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables students to reach higher standards and achieve well, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of students
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve
 - require students to act upon the advice given in marking to improve their progress and attitudes to learning
 - check carefully students' understanding of what they are learning by asking searching questions
 - swiftly review students' work, especially that of boys, during lessons to make sure they are engaged with the tasks set and that they are making good progress
 - improve, check and modify, when necessary, students' attitudes to learning
 - support the development of English and mathematical skills in all subjects.

- Urgently improve the impact of leadership, management and governance by acting swiftly to ensure:
 - that leaders at all levels, including governors, relentlessly focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to eradicate that which presently requires improvement or is inadequate
 - that all subject leaders provide accurate assessment information to senior leaders and governors so that underachieving students can be identified swiftly and appropriate actions taken to improve their learning
 - that all subject leaders make sure that school policies are carried out effectively to ensure greater consistency in the quality of marking and teaching
 - rigorous checking of the impact of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all students
 - that reading and writing skills are developed strongly in all year groups across the whole of the school's curriculum
 - that pupil premium funding is used effectively to overcome barriers to developing higher standards and better achievement
 - that governors and the sponsor have robust systems to check the accuracy and validity of information they receive in order to hold the school to account.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the regional director of the School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), members of the education advisory board (EAB), members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, a group of staff, and groups of pupils. The inspectors observed 19 part lessons, five of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.

Context

A new vice-principal joined the school in January 2016, and a deputy special educational needs coordinator joined in February 2016. The learning leaders of English and humanities left the school at the end of the autumn term 2015. They have been replaced by internal appointments. The EAB has been restructured, with a new chair and several new members. A restructure of staffing is planned.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards of attainment and achievement are improving across the school. The school's own progress information shows current Year 11 pupils are making better progress than the Year 11 cohort in 2015. Current Year 11 pupils are on track to meet the government's floor standards (the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11), with an increase in the proportion of pupils gaining five good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The progress of pupils in English in the current Year 11 is in line with the national the average. Although the progress in mathematics is better than for Year 11 2015, it is still below the national average. Progress in mathematics lags behind that in English across the school. Attainment and progress in core and additional science are still too low.

Many opportunities are provided to help pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make better progress. These interventions are carefully monitored and evaluated and adjusted to better meet the needs of pupils where necessary. As a result, pupil premium funding is spent appropriately to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. The outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in their GCSE examinations improved in 2015 and are on track to improve further in 2016. Leaders carefully monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school. Consequently, gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing in most year groups.

In 2015, the attainment of boys in Year 11 was well below that of girls. In 2016, boys are on track to close the gap in attainment and make better progress in English and mathematics. However, boys' progress in English lags well behind that of girls in the current Year 11.

There is a strong focus on the most-able pupils in the school. In Year 11, pupils have been part of an 'Aspire' project at a local sixth-form college. A group of pupils were visiting Cambridge University during the inspection. The most-able pupils in Year 11 seen in lessons and spoken to during the inspection demonstrated real aspiration to succeed. They were seen working hard and making good progress in their English and mathematics lessons. The most-able scientists are studying separate sciences at GCSE and are on track to make good progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve as a result of well-judged professional development opportunities and bespoke packages of support for those teachers whose practice is not good. Senior leaders have shared high expectations of what must be included in lessons to secure good progress: the 'non-negotiables'. Consequently, the expectations teachers have of what pupils can achieve have been raised and the rate of progress is accelerating. However, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent.

Focused training means that teachers understand the need to plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of their pupils. In some lessons, this planning is sophisticated and pupils are stretched or receive additional support if it is needed. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, all pupils practised an examination question which the group had done badly in a mock examination. However, some pupils quickly moved on to more complex work. Plans are under way to support teachers in their practical knowledge and understanding of special educational needs. Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. As a result, progress overall is improving.

Although not yet consistent, the quality of marking and feedback in line with the school's policy, is improving. Pupils say that the opportunity to respond to written and oral feedback is helping their understanding. For example, in a Year 10 physics lesson, pupils had provided extensive, well-written responses to the teacher's feedback questions. As a result, the pupils are making rapid progress. Teachers' questioning in lessons is developing. Pupils are more frequently required to give full answers to demonstrate their understanding and deepen their thinking. Questioning has less impact on progress when teachers accept one-word answers or provide too many prompts to pupils.

As a result of higher expectations and improvements in the quality of teaching, pupils' attitudes to learning have improved, particularly at key stage 4. Older pupils understand well the importance of working hard to achieve success. During the inspection, strong engagement was seen in Year 11 English and mathematics lessons. However a minority of key stage 3 lessons are still interrupted by low-level disruption from boys and girls. For the most part, this disruption is dealt with effectively.

Staff in all curriculum areas have a common understanding of how to teach calculations as a result of training in mathematical skills. The learning leaders of mathematics and science are working together to develop the higher level numeracy needed for the new science curriculum. Work to develop English and writing across the curriculum is planned. The learning leader of English is supporting the learning leader for expressive arts to improve pupils' writing. It is too soon to see the impact of the work to develop English and mathematical skills across the curriculum.

New teachers are nurtured and developed effectively and given opportunities to take on leadership roles. They regularly share good practice at breakfast meetings. As a result, new teachers quickly acquire strategies for effective teaching, learning and assessment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

In the majority of lessons, behaviour is calm, respectful and polite. There are good relationships between pupils and their peers, and with staff. Both staff and pupils say behaviour has improved as a result of more consistent application of the behaviour policy. Pupils say that their learning is rarely disturbed by poor behaviour and, where this happens, it is quickly addressed.

Safeguarding procedures in the school are a strength. The EAB makes regular safeguarding checks and receives an annual safeguarding audit from the local authority, and regular health and safety reports from the principal. The school works well with other agencies to keep pupils safe. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that any bullying is swiftly dealt with.

At the principal's request, the local authority has carried out a review of attendance. As a result, the school has responded quickly to suggestions from the review and can demonstrate detailed and rigorous tracking of attendance. However, some pupils are regularly absent from school and external support to impact on hard-to-reach families has been lacking. Attendance does not have a high profile among pupils. Punctuality of some pupils is poor and lateness is not rigorously addressed by all staff. Consequently, some pupils do not have a good understanding of the importance of good attendance and punctuality.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership and management at all levels have improved. The principal continues to drive school improvement relentlessly. Senior leaders know well where the strengths and weaknesses are in the school. Senior leaders line manage middle leaders with greater consistency and rigour. The impact of the improvements in leadership can be seen in the better quality of teaching and improved pupils' outcomes.

As a result of effective support and training, middle leaders are increasingly independent in their leadership roles. They speak confidently about the monitoring and evaluation they undertake to make sure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is more consistent and improving in their subject areas. As a result, the quality of teaching and marking and feedback is improving. Middle leaders hold their teachers to account more effectively for the progress of pupils, especially those who are underachieving. Consequently, timely support for pupils is planned, resulting in better progress.

The principal continues to develop the curriculum and a new curriculum is planned for September 2016. The new curriculum provides more time for English and mathematics for all pupils and further opportunities for those who need to catch up to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Specialist reading schemes continue to impact positively on the reading ages of pupils.

As a result of the restructure of the EAB, members of the EAB hold senior and middle leaders to account more effectively. The members of the EAB interviewed during the inspection demonstrated a good understanding of the standards and progress across the school and the quality of teaching. Members of the EAB are regular visitors to the school. They meet with learning leaders, look at pupils' work and make visits to lessons with senior leaders. As a consequence, they are able to check the accuracy and validity of the information they receive.

External support

The school makes effective use of a range of sources of support. SPTA advisers have contributed successfully to improvements in middle leadership and the quality of teaching, for example in English and mathematics. Outcomes for pupils are improving as a result. An external consultant is working in a similar way with technology and science teachers. The regional director of SPTA continues to visit the school regularly and hold senior leaders to account as a member of the EAB and through her work with the principal.

The principal has engaged the local authority to undertake a number of reviews including of attendance, pupil premium and support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. As a result, the school is swift to act on the areas for improvement identified in each review. These actions are impacting positively on policies for attendance and pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders from a local academy continue to provide effective support and challenge for middle and senior leaders. The impact can be seen in improved leadership.