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11 February 2016

Mr David Seddon  
Principal  
Baxter College  
Habberley Road  
Kidderminster  
Worcestershire  
DY11 5PQ

Dear Mr Seddon

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Baxter College**

Following my visit with Chris Chapman, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 2 and 3 February 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 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 academy's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement 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 Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve achievement so that all groups of students, especially disadvantaged students, make good or better progress by:
  - ensuring that rigorous tracking of students' progress across all subjects, including the sixth form, identifies underachievement quickly so that prompt action is taken to bring about improvement
  - carefully monitoring the impact of interventions put in place to close the gaps in the achievement of disadvantaged students
  - ensuring all students can access a broad and relevant curriculum that does not limit their future aspirations
  - insisting that teachers seize every opportunity when planning lessons to develop students' skills and confidence in reading, writing and number work.
  
- Strengthen the leadership of the academy by:
  - ensuring that leaders at all levels develop an accurate understanding of the academy by introducing more rigorous processes of quality assurance
  - making sure that the academy development planning is based on accurate evaluations of the academy's effectiveness, reflects the priorities of the academy's work and includes measurable criteria by which success can be judged
  - ensuring that information about students' achievement is routinely used to evaluate the quality of teaching
  - ensuring senior leaders and subject leaders evaluate collated information about achievement, behaviour and attendance to assess the impact of the academy's actions
  - ensuring that the spending of the pupil premium funding has a direct impact on disadvantaged students' achievement and attendance.
  
- Strengthen the governance of the academy by:
  - ensuring that governors use a range of sources of information to inform their understanding of the performance of the academy
  - ensuring that governors use this information to hold the Principal and senior leaders accountable for the outcomes of all groups of students, particularly disadvantaged students.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics, so that the progress and attainment of all students, especially disadvantaged students, improves rapidly by:
  - implementing a comprehensive programme of training that develops teachers' skills and confidence in the classroom to impact positively on the progress students make

- providing training for teachers to guarantee that the assessment of students' work is accurate
  - ensuring that teachers use information about students' progress from assessments and regular marking to plan lessons at the right level of difficulty for the different groups of students
  - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve by ensuring that the activities teachers plan are interesting and challenging, so that students are motivated to learn and stretched by their learning activities
  - making sure that students are clear about the next steps they need to take to improve their progress as a result of effective marking and feedback.
- 
- Further improve the attendance of all groups of students including those attending courses away from school to at least the national average.
  - An external review of governance, and of the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 February 2016**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, another member of the governing body and representatives from those providing external support for the academy. The academy's statement of action and improvement plan were evaluated.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection there has been a review of governance and of the academy's use of pupil premium. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed and the governing body has been restructured to enable closer monitoring of the academy's work. This includes the appointment of new governors with appropriate expertise. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been clarified and several changes to subject leaders have been made. The academy is currently investigating potential partnerships with other schools and academies.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

You and your leaders have worked quickly to implement improved systems that support the more rigorous monitoring that is becoming a prominent feature in the academy. These systems underpin the higher expectations in the academy of what pupils should achieve, particularly disadvantaged students.

The changes made have ensured that senior leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities and their key priorities. Middle leaders now have structures and processes in place which ensure they are more accountable for the quality of teaching and for pupils' progress in their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders monitor these activities very closely to ensure that they are being carried out when they should be and how they should be so that information is accurate and leads to appropriate support. However, as leaders agree, currently the focus is on monitoring whether actions are taking place rather than evaluating the impact they are having. Consequently, at this early stage of the improvement process, not all senior and middle leaders are yet able to articulate the impact of their work on improving outcomes for pupils. Further, as you and your leaders have identified, there remain some clear areas of weakness. The most notable of these are the poorer progress made by pupils in mathematics and the slower progress made across the curriculum for pupils with a disability or special educational needs.

The relatively recent appointment of a member of staff as a 'pupil premium champion' has had a positive impact on the progress made by this group of pupils, particularly since the external review of pupil premium was completed. This is

because pupil premium funding is now directed very carefully towards tackling the identified barriers to learning these pupils may face. For example, the breakfast club has been extended to provide a place where pupils can access learning resources to ensure that they are ready for the day and equipped to learn.

Staff morale is good, despite some anxiety related to uncertainty over the academy's future. This uneasiness is clearly shared by a number of parents. You, your leaders and governors agree that this needs to be addressed as soon as possible, by developing clear channels for communication so that parents, staff and pupils feel that they have a voice in the process.

The academy's professional development programme is directly addressing areas of weakness in teaching identified at the last inspection. Staff value this and the opportunities they have to work with colleagues across the school in developing improved practice. However, at this early point such practice is inconsistent. For instance, although some teachers are now using questioning effectively, not all teachers have yet fully developed their skills in ensuring that planned questions encourage pupils to think carefully and provide well-expressed and developed responses. Similarly, while inspectors noted some very effective planning to meet pupils' needs, not all teachers are ensuring that activities are set at the right level of challenge to secure pupils' good progress over time. We agreed that leaders now need to develop ways of analysing the impact of training, in terms of improved pupil outcomes, so that further support can be provided where required.

The curriculum is evolving. Leaders have made considered changes to the range and organisation of subjects offered to ensure that the curriculum secures improved outcomes for pupils, but also still meets the needs of a diverse pupil population. For instance, less-able pupils in Year 7 have been provided with additional time to develop basic skills in literacy and mathematics in order to enhance their access to the wider curriculum. There is now an appropriate balance of vocational and academic courses at Key Stage 4 with opportunities for pupils to follow suitably challenging pathways, so that they have a wider range of choices post-16.

A new assessment system has been established to meet the requirements of the new curriculum and recent changes to qualifications. Although this is at an early stage in terms of the academy's ability to test its accuracy and reliability, leaders are now more able to carefully track the progress of all pupils and of groups of pupils.

The review of governance has been completed and governors have produced an appropriate action plan for improvement. They have already taken a number of steps to develop the effectiveness of governance, including undertaking training to ensure they can carry out their statutory duties. They have also made some effective appointments to ensure that they have the required expertise. The appointment of a governor with a wealth of knowledge and understanding of assessment information has been particularly valuable. As a result, governors are in a better position to hold academy leaders to account.

We discussed and agreed that leaders would ensure the academy's website is fully compliant by my next visit.

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

Teaching is improving and inspectors saw no evidence of inadequate teaching during the inspection. However there is variability in the quality of teaching across subjects. In some subjects, such as science and more recently in English, teaching has a very positive impact on pupils' progress. This is because teachers plan lessons based on an accurate understanding of what pupils already know and understand.

Consequently, challenge is matched correctly to ability and this helps to move pupils on in their learning quickly. In a Key Stage 4 biology lesson, the teacher's careful planning of well-chosen activities motivated and enthused pupils so that they made good progress in their understanding of meiosis. Similarly, in a Year 11 English lesson, the teacher had carefully devised engaging activities that enabled pupils to share their knowledge and understanding in order to analyse a poem.

However, these strengths in teaching are not seen in all subjects, particularly in mathematics. In this subject teachers often do not consider well enough what pupils can already do when planning learning and are not focused enough on securing the conceptual understanding required to make good progress over time in mathematics. This results in inconsistencies in the progress made by pupils of different abilities because the work set does not offer the right level of challenge. Consequently, the most-able pupils are not stretched sufficiently with difficult work. Furthermore, teachers do not check carefully enough how well pupils have understood new learning so that less-able pupils struggle to secure key concepts before teachers move on. Assessment in this subject is too often inaccurate and does not provide a sound basis for planning future learning.

Effective changes made to the academy's marking policy were noted by inspectors who were impressed with the quality of advice given and the opportunities provided for pupils to assess each other's work and to respond to their teachers' comments. As a result, pupils were able to show that they had understood what to do next to improve.

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

Overall, behaviour around the academy is orderly. Although inspectors noted one or two occasions of more boisterous behaviour at breaktimes, this was not the norm. Pupils feel that behaviour is usually good. They say that although there is sometimes disruption in lessons it is dealt with quickly. Inspectors noted, and you agree, that pupils are less engaged in their learning where teaching is weaker.

Leaders keep detailed records of behaviour incidents. This year, you have developed a well-planned tracking system that allows you to analyse behaviour types and

patterns in order to inform actions taken to tackle this, although it is too early to identify measurable impact.

Pupils feel safe and are safe. They say that bullying is rare and they do not experience discrimination. This is borne out by the academy's records. Pupils say that they are taught about risk and how to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to social media and other online activities. Modern British values are embraced in terms of respect and tolerance, which is a feature around the academy. However, pupils have less understanding of the ideas behind democracy and the law. Moreover, pupils do not yet have a deep understanding of the risks that may be posed by extremism and radicalisation. We agreed that the academy would address this through the revised programme for personal, social and health education.

Attendance remains below average, with lower attendance for disadvantaged pupils. While records demonstrate the tenacity with which leaders have worked with, and secured improvement for, some individuals, you are not yet able to demonstrate significant improvement on attendance overall. The picture is similar for fixed-term exclusions.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Outcomes in 2015 improved and the academy met the floor standards. Nonetheless, the progress pupils made in English and mathematics, according to published information, was well below the national average, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Although successful challenges to examination marking suggests the proportion making expected progress in English will be higher than published, you and your leaders have recognised the need to tackle these discrepancies quickly and have taken firm action to improve teaching and assessment to secure the required improvements. As a result, current monitoring of progress for pupils and groups of pupils suggests that progress in English is improving rapidly in all year groups, although improvement is slower in mathematics. However, we discussed this issue and agreed that the new assessment system is as yet untested, and does not enable leaders to make a direct comparison with the progress made by pupils last year. Moreover, the steps you have taken to tackle the inaccuracies of assessment in mathematics are in their early stages. As a result, you agree that there is not yet a reliable baseline from which to measure progress in this subject.

Achievement at A level improved in 2015, and this year there is evidence that it is also improving at advanced subsidiary level. This is the result of actions taken to improve learners' 'readiness' for studying at level 3. For example, the head of sixth form has introduced a mentoring programme to support Year 12 students in developing the skills required for independent learning. In addition, the recently established sixth form working group meets regularly to check learners' progress. As a result, leaders are now able to identify more quickly any learners experiencing problems, which is enabling early additional support to be put in place.



## **External support**

The academy has commissioned a range of appropriate support from local outstanding schools and from the Birmingham Mathematics Team. In addition, they have commissioned Babcock's, the traded services division of Worcestershire local authority, to provide a project management board that oversees all support to ensure that it is meeting the academy's needs. This is proving effective in supporting the academy to move forward.