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Mr Liam Nolan and Mrs Jackie Powell
Headteacher
Perry Beeches III the Free School
23 Langley Walk
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West Midlands
B15 2EF

Dear Mr Nolan and Mrs Powell

Special measures monitoring inspection of Perry Beeches III the Free School

Following my visit with Louise Mallet and Paul Elliott, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 8–9 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 trust's statement of action that incorporates the school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2015.

- Eradicate students' underachievement and ensure their good progress in all subjects by making sure that all teachers know how, and take action, to:
 - assess students' work accurately and use this information well to identify where there are gaps in learning
 - plan work which addresses weaknesses and builds on earlier learning, avoids too much repetition and is at the right level of difficulty for students
 - give clear instructions to students and check their understanding before they start work
 - tell other adults who are supporting the lesson what they should do and which students they should work with to make sure that all groups of students, but particularly the disadvantaged and disabled students and those with special educational needs, quickly catch up with their peers.

- Take prompt and decisive action to improve students' reading skills by:
 - repeating checks on reading ages for all students to identify those who need more intensive support when they start in the school and those whose reading skills may slow as they move through the school
 - introducing a programme which teaches the weakest students to read and ensures they read books that are at the right level for their stage in reading
 - training sixth form students and other adults in the use of phonics strategies (the sounds letters represent) so that they know how to help students in paired reading sessions.

- Implement a whole school approach to numeracy so that students are given every opportunity to apply and to improve their skills across other subjects.

- Improve leadership by introducing more accurate checks so that leaders at all levels, including governors, have an accurate view of the school and the areas that need to improve by:
 - using teacher assessment information in the separate subjects of English and mathematics more strategically, so that leaders know how much progress is being made from individual starting points by groups of students and how this compares with others in the school and nationally
 - using teacher assessments and information on the progress being made by students to inform judgements being made on the quality of teaching
 - checking students' written work is set at the right level of difficulty checking the quality of teachers' marking in students' books.

- Improve the way in which targets are set for all teachers and, when successfully achieved, are used to reward the best teachers and leaders by:
 - using the teachers’ standards and career expectations to make sure targets set are sufficiently challenging
 - using information on the progress being made by students in teachers’ classes, in subject areas, in year groups or whole school, as appropriate to the teacher’s role in the school.

External reviews of governance, and of the school’s use of the pupil premium and catch up funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8–9 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteachers, senior and middle leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, parents, members of the local governing body, the school improvement partner, and representatives of Perry Beeches The Academy Trust.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new senior teacher has been appointed with key responsibilities for the analysis of pupils' achievement information. A new head of English has also taken up post. A review of governance, undertaken by the National Governors' Association, has been completed and its draft report was made available to inspectors. One additional parent governor has been appointed to increase the size of the local governing body and plans are in place to further increase the number of non-executive governors.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteachers continue to provide a clear and inspiring vision for school improvement that is widely shared across an energetic and enthusiastic staff team. A 'can do' attitude permeates the school community which raises the aspirations of pupils, parents, carers and staff, and which promotes a general determination to overcome any barriers to pupils' achievement. This is manifested in the marked improvements in the school's provision to develop pupils' literacy skills across subjects since the last monitoring inspection. The consistent focus on better spelling, punctuation and grammar, alongside the enrichment of pupils' general and subject-specific vocabulary, has much improved pupils' written work and confidence in expressing their views. Since the last monitoring inspection, the school's newly appointed numeracy coordinator has also trained all staff in the promotion of numeracy across the curriculum. Evidence is emerging of effective use of number by pupils across subjects to improve the accuracy of work and to strengthen arguments through the use of statistics.

The leadership of teaching is a particular strength in promoting the school's improvement. A high proportion of the school's teachers are in the early stages of their career, and some have accelerated rapidly into middle leadership positions. The school, well supported by the trust, offers staff and leaders comprehensive programmes of support and professional development that enable the school to recruit, 'grow' and retain subject specialists. The more effective systems of assessment introduced since the section 5 inspection have enabled staff and leaders to set clearer targets and be more readily accountable for improving pupils' achievement. Teaching assistants' performance is now also measured in terms of their impact on pupils' progress, so that they also have clear goals in their work.

However, the widespread confidence in the school's improvement and direction of travel does blunt leaders' self-evaluation of school performance at a number of levels. Leaders appropriately celebrate improvements in key aspects of provision and outcomes, but too often are not sufficiently questioning or critical of evidence: for example, that which shows variations of learning or progress by pupil groups or between subjects. As a result, explanation of the reasons for such variations is too often anecdotal rather than evidenced firmly though reviews of monitoring information between senior and middle leaders. The statement of action is now fit for purpose because it has set out clearer long-term and interim targets, and leaders are now beginning to evaluate progress against those targets. However, the roles, responsibilities and structures for monitoring and regular, distinct evaluation of the school's progress remain blurred. In particular, while the committed and determined governors have been active in their monitoring visits to school, there is insufficient evidence that this information has been drawn together and used by the local governing body to question and challenge leaders on aspects of the school's performance. Heavy reliance is placed on the three key meetings per year of the local governing body to deal with this and other business. The review of governance has given the local governing body, and the trust which oversees its function, a clear agenda to improve its structures to carry out its vital function. Steps have already been taken, but a coherent plan is now needed to ensure that all these issues are fully addressed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

A marked improvement is evident in the promotion of pupils' literacy skills across subjects since the last inspection. All classrooms are now fully focused on supporting pupils with language and grammar, for example through displays on 'working walls', wide availability and use of dictionaries and thesauruses, and successful 'literacy mats' that encourage pupils to explore and define less familiar words and language. The impact of this work in improving pupils' standards of writing is demonstrably evident in pupils' books. Many pupils show an increasing confidence to put forward their views in class discussions, although during the inspection teachers' questioning was not always sufficiently well targeted to draw in the least confident and least able. Pupils' reading skills continue to be promoted well by the early morning 'class reader' sessions. Pupils would value more independent reading opportunities through the school library which, while considerably better stocked than at the time of the last monitoring inspection, is still in development under a newly appointed librarian and her pupil team.

The catch-up sessions for English and mathematics every day after school continue to help pupils to address weaknesses in basic skills and understanding in mathematics and English. They have been particularly effective in accelerating the progress of the high proportion of pupils designated as having special educational needs by identifying and addressing gaps in their knowledge and skills. The most-able pupils in higher sets in English and mathematics are often challenged to think deeply about the topics, texts and issues they are considering, and their aspirations are boosted by a range of extra-curricular opportunities that promote a love of

learning. Where classes include pupils of different levels of ability, teachers mostly endeavour to ensure that the levels of difficulty of tasks are adapted accordingly. However, there are instances in both settled and mixed-ability groups where work is pitched too low for the most able, or where the teacher's questioning is not adapted so that it is understood by the least able.

Teachers' subject knowledge is typically a strength in lessons, and this promotes pupils' confidence and enjoyment. Teachers use resources well to support pupils' learning and engage their interest. In design and technology, work-related projects add particular relevance to pupils' learning. The school's 'response marking' system is consistently well used by teachers and pupils to identify and make corrections and improvements to pupils' work. While the assessment system enables teachers and leaders, as well as pupils and parents, to track pupils' progress and intervene quickly to address underachievement, pupils' targets are not always adjusted upwards quickly enough to reflect the progress they have made. Sometimes pupils are given 'target grades' that are lower than their current 'working at grades', and some pupils and their parents say that this can dampen aspirations. Nonetheless, parents' views about all aspects of the work of the school have improved markedly during the current academic year and are highly positive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour, and works closely with parents to reinforce these. As a consequence, pupils' conduct around the school is polite, courteous and respectful. Attendance remains high and pupils are consistently very punctual, both to school and to lessons. They arrive at lessons ready to learn, and most apply themselves fully to their tasks throughout, even where they find tasks difficult. Exclusions are used as sanctions in instances of poor behaviour, but during the current academic year their use has been proportionate and monitored for effectiveness. The school's curriculum and the teaching of individual lessons encourages pupils of diverse ethnicity, culture and religion to be highly reflective about society, the world and their position within it. A strong and positive emphasis is placed throughout the curriculum on equality of opportunity and valuing diversity. Safeguarding of pupils meets requirements, and staff and governors receive regular and effective training.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress in mathematics continues to develop strongly overall as a result of well-planned teaching and support programmes that ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are tackled. Pupils' progress in English and in other subjects is accelerating as pupils' literacy improves. Generally and across subjects, pupils have shown a marked improvement in the accuracy and fluency of their writing since the last monitoring inspection. While there remain weaknesses for some in basic skills, including presentation and letter formation, pupils are now readily accessing dictionaries and grammatical guidance to sharpen and enrich their writing. They are also learning to give written arguments more force through the

development of their explanations, for example in using statistics. Gaps between reading and chronological ages, wide for a significant minority on entry to the school, have continued to close as pupils' phonics and comprehension skills continue to be successfully developed in their reading programmes.

Some variations in outcomes for groups of pupils remain. By Year 9, there is a wide gap between the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress and that of other pupils, although this gap has narrowed in Year 8 and reversed in Year 7. Leaders have taken a number of the steps recommended in the pupil premium review of November 2015, and their transparent presentation of pupil premium and catch-up fund spending on individual pupil interventions helps leaders to take a view of its effectiveness. Data showing less progress for the most able than their peers by Year 9 reflects some variation in the degree of challenge for these pupils between lessons. Also by Year 9, there are marked differences between subjects in the proportions of pupils making expected progress. Slower progress in humanities and languages is linked to the legacy of low literacy skills, and will need to be monitored carefully as pupils move to their GCSE programmes.

External support

Staff and leaders have continued to benefit from close working with other schools in trust, especially in terms of teacher training, continuing professional development and the moderation of assessments. The trust has, however, yet to ensure that systems of governance at Perry Beeches III the Free School provide robust evidence that leaders are being held regularly and fully to account for all aspects of the school's improvement.