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29 April 2016

Mr Pat Rice
Principal
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Dear Mr Rice

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cedar Mount Academy

Following my visit with Fiona Burke-Jackson 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 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 April 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 not taking effective actions towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester City Council. 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 that 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 second monitoring inspection on 22 March 2016 to 23 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, members of the school improvement board and the chief executive of the trust. They observed teaching and learning and spoke with teachers. They spent time observing how pupils behaved around the school. A particular focus for this monitoring inspection was how far senior leaders had progressed in tackling pupils' poor behaviour.

Context

A new special educational needs co-ordinator took up her post in January 2016. Seven of the teachers who were working in a supply capacity at the time of the last inspection have now been given fixed-term contracts until August. A lead teacher for science has been appointed and will take up his position after Easter. He will also take a leadership role in the department alongside the assistant vice-principal who is temporarily overseeing this subject. A lead teacher for mathematics has also been appointed to join the school in June. The principal will leave the school in July and the trust has started the process of appointing his successor.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In response to the last monitoring inspection, senior leaders have produced a much sharper action plan. They are now using it more effectively as a working document to monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions. Since the inspection in December 2015, senior leaders have been successful in bringing about some improvements, particularly in pupils' behaviour in lessons. However, the school is not far enough along its improvement journey. There is insufficient evidence to indicate that it will no longer require special measures at its next full inspection in just over a year's time.

There is a lack of clarity about the present strategic leadership of the school and this ambiguity is detrimental to the overall rate of improvement. As this school moves towards its next section 5 inspection it requires strong, incisive and consistent leadership. That said, many leaders are working very hard and the impact of this can be seen most significantly in the improvements in many pupils' attitudes to learning.

In contrast to the views expressed during the last inspection, most staff now feel that senior leaders support them in dealing with challenging behaviour. Teachers feel that this has had a positive impact on their classroom practice as they can now focus on teaching rather than behaviour management. In a recent staff survey, 80% of teachers said that senior leaders support them with behaviour and 75% said that classroom disruption has reduced.

The school improvement board continues to provide the appropriate level of challenge and support to leaders across the school. Since the last inspection they have become more proactive in seeing actual evidence of leaders' actions for themselves. Indeed, the chair of the school improvement board and the director of secondary education, who is also a board member, spend several days each week in the school working alongside senior leaders.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders now judge 40% of teaching to be good or better across the school, which represents improvement since the last monitoring inspection, when this figure was 33%. Giving several supply teachers fixed-term contracts has led to a more stable staffing profile. However, too many pupils still do not have the opportunity to benefit from consistently high-quality teaching, particularly in science. In the physical education department, however, new leadership and consistent staffing have contributed to strong teaching and learning. Pupils also speak positively about the extra-curricular activities that this department offers.

In a recent review of teaching and learning carried out by the trust, 70% of teaching observed was judged to be good or better. While this is to be welcomed, of some concern is the discrepancy between this and what is typically happening in classrooms on a day-to-day basis. Pupils deserve and need this level of high-quality teaching consistently if they are to make sustained progress. Senior leaders do not have high enough expectations of how learning is routinely planned across the school. Inspectors' observations show that this means there is still wide variation and inequalities in pupils' access to effective teaching.

Inspectors saw evidence of how improvements in pupils' behaviour in the classroom are having a positive impact on their learning. This was particularly evident in English lessons. However, inspectors also observed how pupils in some classes are still having their learning disrupted by the behaviour of others.

Senior leaders are aware that if pupils are to make the best possible progress, teachers need to challenge them more. This is particularly the case for the most able, but applies to all pupils, regardless of their prior attainment. Scrutiny of pupils' work showed that teachers' different expectations have a direct impact on the quality of work.

Teachers interviewed during the inspection commented on the positive impact the new special educational needs co-ordinator has had since her arrival in January. She is working closely with departments to ensure that the needs of pupils are met effectively in the classroom. A priority for senior leaders is to establish a strong stable team of well-trained teaching assistants. At the moment there is a wide variation in the impact that they are having in the classroom.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Senior leaders responded swiftly to the concerns raised at the last monitoring inspection about pupils' poor behaviour. They have simplified the behaviour management system and there is now a greater clarity about the incremental severity of sanctions. This new system, coupled with senior leaders being more proactive in this area, has led to an improvement in pupils' behaviour during the majority of lessons. Pupils spoken to during the inspection recognised the efforts staff are making to improve behaviour, but as one Year 10 girl explained: 'some students are still stuck in their old ways'. Pupils also report that there are still some teachers who are not using the system consistently, and giving 'too many chances'.

Senior leaders now understand that a behaviour system is only effective if pupils know it is robust and that they cannot get away with not attending detentions. Staff have worked hard to tighten up procedures, and pupils now know that a missed one-hour detention will lead to a two-hour detention. The internal exclusion unit is now run much more effectively. Pupils now see spending time in this unit as a serious consequence for poor behaviour.

While the impact of senior leaders' actions can be seen in improved behaviour during lessons, this is not the case at other times throughout the day. During breaks and lunchtimes, too many pupils still do not conduct themselves in a calm and mature manner. However, of particular concern is their behaviour between lessons and at the end of the day. Senior leaders have introduced a one-way system to improve behaviour on the main staircase, but the way many pupils conduct themselves in this area is still very worrying. Too many hurtle down the stairs in a manner that is dangerous to themselves and others. There is still too much barging into each other and shouting. Inspectors also saw examples of open defiance from a small number of pupils during these times. Pupils refusing to follow reasonable requests and walking away from staff represents a safeguarding concern. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors say that fights are still frequent occurrences and that there is a great deal of bad language used around the school.

During transitions between lessons and at the end of break and lunchtime, there are many senior and pastoral staff around the school. These staff work hard to encourage all pupils to behave acceptably and adhere to the school rules. While many pupils do, there are a small number who present a significant challenge to staff. Senior leaders are aware that there is a need for a separate inclusion unit within the school where staff can work more effectively with these pupils. A purpose-built location exists on site but staffing difficulties have meant that this unit has not been operational. There is an urgent need for it to be opened and staffed effectively as soon as possible.

Actions taken to improve attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent continue to have impact, although the figures are still well below national averages. Actions taken to reduce the number of pupils who are late to the

school have had significant impact, with the proportion of these pupils reducing from 6.5% in the autumn term to 2.4% in the spring term. There is still a concern about the number of pupils who are late to their lessons and form time, with inspectors observing some pupils still on corridors 15 minutes into the start of these sessions.

Outcomes for pupils

Predictions for the 2016 Year 11 outcomes indicate that there is a strong possibility that, for the third year running, the school will not meet the government's current floor standards. Senior leaders are unable to provide convincing evidence that outcomes are set to improve significantly for subsequent year groups.

Strategic leadership of this important area is not strong enough. The senior leader responsible for achievement does not appear to have a firm grasp on pupils' progress information across a range of subjects and year groups. On day one of this monitoring inspection, very little progress information was presented to inspectors and it was not until the afternoon of day two that evidence was presented on the progress of Year 10 across their subjects. This raises concerns about how effectively senior leaders are using this information to inform their actions to rapidly improve outcomes for pupils.

There is more clarity about key stage 3 progress information. While the information shows that there is much to be done if pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are to achieve strong outcomes by the time they complete Year 11, the senior leader responsible for key stage 3 is using it to inform his actions to improve rates of progress.

It is clear that while senior leaders report some improvement in the quality of teaching, this is not yet having the necessary impact on pupils' learning across the school. Inspectors' own observations of learning indicate that teachers are not challenging their pupils enough to make the best possible progress.

External support

The trust has taken a more 'hands on' approach to supporting the school since the last monitoring inspection. This has taken the form of the chair of the school improvement board and the director for secondary education each spending three days a week working alongside senior leaders. This arrangement is set to continue for the period that the school requires special measures. The recent review of teaching and learning carried out by the trust has provided a clear summary of where strong practice exists and priorities for further improvement. Heads of department are using this information to inform their self-evaluation and action plans. Staff in the school are continuing to receive support from specialist leaders in education from the trust's teaching school. The special educational needs department has been receiving support from the trust's targeted specialist support services team.