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Mr Chris Mitchell  
The Elstree UTC  
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Elstree  
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Hertfordshire  
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Dear Mr Mitchell

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Elstree UTC**

Following my visit to your school on 29 April 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- review and make appropriate amendments to the strategies you are using to improve the attendance and behaviour of a small minority of pupils in the main school and the sixth form to ensure that the rate of improvement increases
- provide teachers with the information and strategies that they need to plan and deliver learning that precisely meets the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, pupils, three governors and four teachers, to discuss the actions taken since the last

inspection. Documents including the school's self-evaluation documents and improvement plan as well as attendance, achievement and behaviour records were evaluated. During two learning walks, including one with you, I observed pupils at work in lessons and undertook a scrutiny of work in books. I also considered views expressed by pupils at break and lunchtime as well as those in a letter received during the course of the inspection.

## **Context**

Significant changes have taken place at the school since the last inspection. You took up your post as acting principal in June 2015, working alongside a temporary executive principal. Your position as principal was made permanent in March 2016; the executive principal then left the school. The senior team now includes a recently appointed special educational needs coordinator as well as an acting vice-principal. A leader of the science department and a head of sixth form took up their posts in September 2015. Eleven teachers have left the school and ten have started. There has also been a refinement of the governance structure to align more closely to the work of the school.

## **Main findings**

- Leaders, including governors, have correctly focused upon strengthening leadership at the school. The appointment of leaders of special educational needs, the sixth form and the science department have increased the school's capacity to improve. Teachers and pupils spoke of the positive impact of the changes that have been introduced in the past academic year. They commented on the increased clarity and organisation which leaders have brought to the school.
- You have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done and have made it clear which leader is responsible for each aspect of school improvement. As a team, senior leaders provide energetic leadership with a sharp focus on bringing about rapid, sustainable improvements. You and your leaders have outlined your priorities, with your 'five fundamentals' underpinning the improvements that you are leading. The school improvement plan has been amended and includes the issues raised at the previous inspection. It is now more squarely focused upon improving pupils' outcomes. You are aware that, while many challenges have been overcome, significant ones still remain. These include raising pupils' attendance and quickly improving the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- Governors offer support and challenge to you and your senior team and now take appropriate actions to assure themselves of the accuracy of what they are being told, for example by spending time with their link directors (subject leaders). Governors are knowledgeable and wholeheartedly committed to the vision of the school. They are aware that while there have been some improvements, there needs to be an acceleration in the pace of these

improvements. Similarly, they are aware that although they challenge you about the quality of education that you provide, they should provide more scrutiny of the answers that you and other leaders provide.

- Sixth-form provision is improving under the enthusiastic leadership of the head of post-16. The previous report noted that learners were following courses for which they were not appropriately prepared. To address this, the head of post-16 has provided clarity on the course requirements for pupils intending to join the sixth form. He has also made improvements to the tutor system, something that is welcomed by many learners. More learners are applying to university and fewer leaving before the end of their post-16 studies.
- The previous inspection report also noted that assessment information was not consistently accurate or easily understood. Under the leadership of your acting vice-principal, the accuracy of assessment information has improved. You have taken appropriate steps to ensure that you validate the information that teachers provide. For example, in English, you have had the accuracy of teachers' assessments confirmed by external moderators. Now you are more certain of the progress that pupils make, you are able to take appropriate action when they fall behind. Since the previous inspection the 2015 examination results have been published. These demonstrated that achievement and attainment were too low across too many subjects. Your careful monitoring indicates that outcomes are improving across many subjects, including English and mathematics. Achievement in subjects such as photography and professional performance make-up remain strong.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are improving across the school, but you are aware that too many inconsistencies remain. Leaders' more frequent and accurate monitoring of lessons is helping you to take effective action where teaching is less than good. You have made clear your expectation about the level of planning that you expect from teachers and the evidence seen indicates that this is being adhered to by many teachers. The work of your teaching and learning group enables the strong practice seen in subjects such as photography, media studies and mathematics to be shared. Teachers explained that it is helping to provide them with the necessary skills, confidence and knowledge to improve their teaching. This has led to an improvement in teaching across many subjects across the school, a fact that is acknowledged by pupils and teachers.
- Evidence from pupils' books and two learning walks, one of which was conducted with you, confirmed that pupils respond well where expectations are high and learning is skilfully planned to meet their needs. For example, this was clearly the case in the sixth-form English lesson that we visited. Similarly, the quality of pupils' work has improved in mathematics. However, in some other subjects, activities are not set at the correct level, particularly for the most able.
- You recognise that teachers have varying expectations of how pupils should present their work and that this is not consistently high enough. Similarly, too frequently feedback is not in line with the school's marking policy. When it is adhered to, pupils respond to the precise feedback provided and are able to

make more rapid progress in improving their work. In my meetings with pupils they voiced concerns about the quality of teaching in a small number of subjects. Pupils explained that in these lessons, teachers' lack of organisation and accuracy in assessment slows the progress that pupils are able to make. Sixth-form learners also explained that a small number of teachers can take too long to provide feedback on the work that is handed in for assessment.

- Attendance remains below national expectations. Adults across the school are clearly aware of their responsibility for raising achievement, but less so for attendance. As a consequence, the onus of improving attendance remains overly reliant upon the work of a small team led by your vice-principal. This team oversees the strategies to improve attendance of pupils, many of whom have a history of very low attendance. While you can demonstrate that the efforts of this team are having a positive impact for some of these pupils, you are aware that more work needs to be done to make sure that attendance is as high as it should be.
- School records demonstrate that behaviour and punctuality to lessons has improved since the last inspection. During my visit, I observed pupils moving purposely to their lessons and many I spoke with were optimistic about their learning. Lessons are often characterised by positive relationships. Pupils are supportive of each other and the very large majority are keen to learn. For example, pupils in a Year 10 mathematics lesson worked very well together to solve increasingly difficult problems. While pupils and teachers explained that behaviour has improved since the last inspection, they told me that the behaviour of a small minority still remains a cause of frustration. You have taken decisive action to address the unacceptable behaviour of a small number of pupils in Year 10. However, some of these pupils remain less willing to work hard and more likely to arrive late to their lessons.
- Pupils now benefit from a more coherent personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme, which is delivered through the school's 'critique' sessions. Pupils explained that they are better equipped to keep themselves safe and have a developing awareness of the world around them. Many sixth-form learners receive effective support as they prepare for future education employment or training. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 would welcome greater opportunities to experience the world of work within the film industry.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is not as effective as it should be. This is because only recently have the appropriate changes been introduced. Teachers are not routinely provided with the precise information that they need in order to plan learning that is well matched to individual requirements of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. The newly appointed leader of the special educational needs department understands what needs to be done and is quickly addressing the main issues. Teachers welcome her expertise and willingness to work with them on an individual basis. However, it is too early to see the impact of her work.

## **External support**

You have requested and received effective support from other schools, for example in the form of the work of the temporary executive principal and the guidance as you developed an appropriate system for tracking and monitoring the progress that pupils make. The work of an external expert in evaluating the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability has provided clarity as to the way forward in this area. You also receive assistance from the University of Hertfordshire in the review and development of many school policies.

I am copying this letter to The Elstree UTC Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**