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Timothy Waites
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Dear Mr Waites

Special measures monitoring inspection of Baxter College

Following my visit with Alison Broomfield and Sukhbir Farar, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 4 and 5 May 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 June 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.

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 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 that 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 second monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim principal and other senior leaders, middle leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and other members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority, and a representative from an external provider of support.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, you have become interim principal, following the retirement of the previous principal. This had led to some changes of responsibility across the senior leadership team.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and your leaders have worked quickly to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and unambiguous following your appointment to the interim principal role a month ago. This has ensured that the actions taken to begin the cycle of improvement noted at my last visit have continued to develop and embed into the everyday life of the school.

A notable step forward since my last visit is the improvement of middle leadership. Subject leaders are now regularly undertaking monitoring activities and using the resulting information more effectively to establish an increasingly accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. Consequently, these leaders feel both empowered to make improvements and held to account for the impact they have. It is clear that they welcome this and have developed a greater sense of their roles within the improvement agenda for the school.

Very regular checks are now in place to ensure that teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' rates of progress. These checks have informed your decision to develop a more personalised programme of professional development and training that is based on specific need but linked to whole-school priorities. The development of this programme is still taking place and we agreed that early impact would be looked for at my next visit.

The changes made to the curriculum at my last visit are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly at key stage 3. However, you have continued to review provision in the light of new curriculum and qualification requirements. In doing so, you have identified that pupils need to develop their skills and understanding in humanities subjects more quickly to meet age-related

expectations and the targets set for them by the school. As a result, from September, Year 7 and 8 pupils will study humanities subjects on a weekly basis rather than as part of a carousel. You are confident that, over time, this will lead to greater success for pupils at GCSE.

An important next step to improve the curriculum further is to undertake a rigorous review of the school's personal, social, health and economic education programme (PSHE). This should focus on identifying exactly what is being taught and when so that leaders can monitor the quality of this provision more effectively. We agreed that appropriate training for staff delivering the programme should also be identified.

Curriculum provision through the 16 to 19 study programmes is effective. This is because the leader of the sixth form has made sure that students are well supported to develop life and work skills as well as studying for qualifications that help them to meet their aspirations. Work experience is closely linked to students' interests and career plans, so that they gain valuable insight and can make considered decisions about their futures.

Leaders have more recently focused on improving parental engagement, with a particular focus on helping parents to understand how to support their children in their studies and what the new assessment system means. Workshops have been held to ensure that parents are supported in these aspects and attendance is increasing as parents become more aware of what is being offered and how it can help them.

Leaders are tracking progress against agreed actions for improvement regularly. However, we agreed that there needs to be a greater focus on the impact of those actions over time so that leaders can judge how quickly the school is moving towards appropriate targets designed to improve outcomes for pupils. Linked to this is the need to further develop the school's analysis of assessment information. Although detailed and useful information is quickly available for key stage 4, this is not yet the case for key stage 3 or post-16. Consequently, some leaders are having to spend too much time working out what assessment information is telling them, before they can take action to address any issues that arise.

Governors have continued to focus on developing their skills and abilities to challenge appropriately. Evidence from minutes of governing body meetings shows that there is an appropriate level of challenge as a result of the much clearer understanding of information about pupils' progress. Governors have a clear vision of where the school needs to be, of its emerging strengths and where the priorities for improvement lie. However, although the governing body is fully aware of its statutory duties and carries these out, some key policies have not been reviewed and updated in a timely manner.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, although still inconsistent, has continued to improve. During this visit, inspectors saw examples of highly effective teaching leading to good progress in lessons and over time. For instance, in psychology, religious education, English, music, art and some mathematics lessons, pupils and students were very well supported to develop high-level skills and to articulate their learning and understanding using relevant and sophisticated language. In these cases, teachers knew their pupils exceptionally well, including their starting points, and planned accordingly. Very effective questioning was a key feature in these subjects and high expectations through well-matched challenge ensured that all pupils made good progress.

Where teaching is weaker, questioning is not used effectively to help pupils think hard and carefully about their responses. Planning is not consistently based on pupils' starting points so that some find the work too easy and some find it too hard. Consequently, in these lessons, low-level disruption can further undermine the learning of pupils. Some of the most-able pupils spoken to by inspectors identified this as a very real frustration for them.

Nonetheless, as a result of the professional development opportunities that the school has provided, teachers are becoming more proficient in the use of assessment information to inform their planning for lessons over time. This is helping them to recognise where pupils have gaps in their knowledge or level of skills and therefore provide more focused learning activities.

In a number of subject lessons, inspectors saw and heard examples of highly effective teacher feedback where there was a clear dialogue with pupils that enabled rapid identification of misconceptions and ensured they understood what to do next to improve. However, this is not consistently the case, so that not all pupils could explain how well they were doing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Records of behaviour incidents show that there has been a continued decline in the number of episodes reported. This is because leaders are now using information about behaviour more strategically. Consequently, pupils who persistently misbehave are identified and actions put in place to address the issues causing the poor behaviour. It was notable that pupils are confident that senior leaders will tackle misbehaviour quickly.

Inspectors saw no very poor behaviour, but some low-level disruption in lessons remains. Pupils state, and inspectors agree, that such behaviour is more common in those subject areas where teaching is perceived to be weaker, or where teachers are known to be inconsistent about application of the behaviour policy. We discussed and agreed the need to revisit and review the behaviour policy to

ensure that processes and procedures are well understood by all staff, including precisely what behaviours should lead to sanctions so that these are addressed in a consistent manner when they occur.

Around the school, pupils are friendly, courteous and nearly always well behaved. They move about the school sensibly and arrive at lessons punctually. Occasional instances of more boisterous behaviour are nonetheless friendly in nature and quickly addressed by staff.

Pupils were very clear that bullying would be promptly and effectively tackled by leaders, including the use of derogatory language. The school is a 'Stonewall Champion' and pupils are very aware of the need to think about the language they use in informal conversations.

Since my last visit, pupils have become more aware of the risks they may face from extremism and radicalisation, and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe on social media and other forms of electronic communication. However, discussions with pupils suggest there remains a lack of understanding in relation to the modern British values of democracy and the law. Older pupils spoke vaguely of learning about this in PSHE lessons, but younger pupils were unsure of the terms used or whether they had been taught anything about such subjects.

Although attendance has improved slightly since my last visit, we agreed that more needs to be done to more rapidly reach at least national averages, particularly for specific groups. This is also the case for fixed-term exclusions. You have recognised this and initiated a project to help leaders to identify the reasons for poor attendance in order to tackle the issue.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress pupils make is beginning to improve, particularly in Year 7 and Year 8. The additional support put in place at my last visit to improve mathematics and English has had a very positive impact for all pupils but also for those in receipt of pupil premium. The school's monitoring of pupils' progress suggests that gaps between pupil premium and non-pupil premium pupils are closing rapidly in these year groups.

Current information suggests that attainment for Year 11 this year will be better than in 2015. However, rates of progress, although improving in both English and mathematics, are not yet rapid enough. Consequently, attainment for this year group will remain below the national average. We agreed that gaps between those in receipt of pupil premium and other pupils remain unacceptably large in this cohort, although there are signs that they are reducing significantly in Year 10.

The progress of pupils with special educational needs or a disability is not improving as quickly as you had hoped. You have taken rapid action to identify the reasons for this and sensible plans are in place to make substantial changes to provision and to the ways in which progress is monitored for this group.

In most year groups, the most able are beginning to make better progress, particularly lower down the school. For instance, in Year 7, the vast majority of these pupils are on track to meet the aspirational targets set by the school in mathematics and a rising proportion are likely to meet at least expectations in English. In Year 8 nearly all pupils are set to meet their targets in English.

Post-16 outcomes are continuing to improve in academic subjects as a result of careful monitoring and checking across subjects. The progress students make from their starting points is improving in almost all A-level subjects, including for girls. Although this is not the case in vocational pathways, you have identified those subjects where students consistently do less well and these subjects will not be offered next year. Instead, academic alternatives will be provided where appropriate.

External support

Commissioned support from the local authority is proving helpful. Regular project board meetings ensure that leaders and governors take a critical view of their progress against the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, enabling further appropriate support to be identified as required.

The continuing external support for mathematics is having an increasing impact on improvement in this subject, particularly in developing the quality of teaching.