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Mr Grant Mottram
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mottram

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbey Woods Academy

Following my visit with Hilary Goddard, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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 which 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 which took place in May 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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 sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the chair of the governing body, CfBT Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helena Read
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe by:
 - collating and maintaining clearance details for all members of staff on a single central record
 - addressing the difficulties around the safety of the site
 - maintaining vigilance to make sure that those areas which are not safe for pupils are not accessible to them.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good in order to accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessment of pupils' current achievement is accurate from the point of entry to the academy so that they provide work which will stretch all groups of pupils, including the most able
 - teachers develop more skilful use of questioning during lessons so that they can move pupils on or support them further
 - all staff develop high expectations and aspirations for all pupils and increase the opportunities for deepening their understanding across all the subjects studied
 - disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs are identified by all teachers, and supported and stretched with work at appropriate levels of challenge, including in the early years
 - work set to develop the technical understanding of English spelling, punctuation and grammar enables pupils to attain higher standards in writing, in all year groups
 - all pupils are motivated to work hard and to take pride in the presentation in their workbooks
 - the behaviour of pupils is managed effectively and consistently so that it does not disrupt their learning and that of others.
- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels, the Trust and governors by ensuring that:
 - the Trust board and governors develop systems to provide them with an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and hold leaders to account for bringing about improvement
 - finances and resources to support disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are allocated and monitored effectively

- the recently forged partnership between the interim headteacher, Trust primary lead, and trust learning and teaching coach is further strengthened to accelerate pupils' progress
- subject leaders have appropriate training to improve the quality of teaching in their areas and are held accountable for pupil progress in their subject.
- Improve outcomes for children in the early years by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments so that appropriate activities are planned for all children
 - ensuring that activities in all lessons stretch pupils of all abilities including the most able and children who are disabled or who have special educational needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

An external review of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the work of the academy can be improved.

Report on the second inspection on 10 and 11 May 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and executive headteacher, leaders responsible for literacy and mathematics, and the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors spoke with parents, pupils, the chair and other members of the rapid improvement board (RIB) and a representative from CfBT. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and at break and lunchtimes. Teaching and learning were observed in lessons and the work in pupils' books was reviewed. A range of documents were scrutinised including the school's procedures to keep pupils safe, information about how pupils at the school are progressing and documents relating to pupils' behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has taken up the post of headteacher in the school's sister school. There is an interim deputy head who is also the special educational needs coordinator who had been in post for five weeks at the time of the inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

More of the school's pupils are making better progress, especially in key stage 1. At key stage 2, many pupils are still behind their peers nationally because of a legacy of poor teaching hampering their progress. The school's own information indicates that pupils in Year 6 are likely to achieve below the national standard this year. However, there are encouraging signs of stronger progress in this year group, especially in mathematics.

Standards in writing are improving and pupils demonstrate the stamina required to write, at length, to the expected standard. In mathematics, pupils have secured the fundamental understanding needed to manipulate numbers effectively. Pupils are responding well to the additional challenge teachers now expect in their mathematics lessons. In general, pupils progress less well in reading than writing, although the progress made in phonics (the sounds letters make) by younger pupils indicates this is on track to improve.

In early years, the patterns of progress are not consistent. In one class the gap for disadvantaged children is far too wide, but in the other the gaps have closed, and in some cases disadvantaged children have outperformed their peers. While the percentage of children on target to reach the expected standards for children in early years has improved, it is still forecast to be below the national figure.

Progress in phonics is now stronger with more pupils having a secure knowledge of how to use their skills to decode words. Pupils in Year 2 are able to use correctly the technical terms of language and write accurate sentences, drawing on their knowledge of word sounds.

While the picture is one of improving achievement across the school, the progress of different groups of pupils is variable with no clear trends emerging on a class-by-class basis. However, overall, pupils who have special educational needs or disability, the most-able and disadvantaged pupils do not consistently perform as well as their classmates.

The quality of teaching

Relationships are strong. Staff know their classes well; they coax and encourage to help move pupils' learning along. Pupils could give numerous examples of how teachers had expected more of them in their topic work, literacy, information technology and mathematics. Teaching continues to improve. Work in books from Year 5 clearly shows sustained progress is being made in writing, with pupils using sophisticated sentence structures and more interesting vocabulary. Pupils' writing is valued and celebrated, such as in an imaginative display in the Year 1 and 2 cloakroom area. In mathematics, pupils are working more independently to solve complex problems and using a range of methods to help them tackle questions. Teachers create opportunities for pupils to have their curiosity awakened. Key stage 2 pupils were exploring different shading techniques in art and then using their new skills to depict different facets of a character from their literature studies.

Teachers follow the school's preferred method of assessment which is linked to age-related judgements. The system is being applied consistently and judgements are broadly accurate. The information is being used to help teachers plan their lessons. However, this information is not yet being fully utilised to support teachers' planning for the learning required for all groups. For example, sometimes the pitch of work for the most able does not offer well-thought-out challenge. In early years, the most-able children were given work to do which was too big a jump from what they know and understand, and this caused confusion for pupils. Leaders need to ensure their work on teaching and learning focuses on helping teachers develop the skills to select work at the right level for all pupils, based on a sharper understanding of the information they have about pupils' progress.

The feedback given in books is helping pupils improve their work. Where it is precise, pupils make strong progress. The effect of verbal feedback witnessed in Years 4, 5 and 2 was powerful because it engaged pupils in conversations about improving their work. Peer and self-marking is also giving pupils opportunities to know what they have to do to improve standards. Learning journals in early years document well evidence of achievement and the stage reached by each child.

Where the best practice in phonics is seen, pupils make strong progress because of a relentless focus on high expectations. Pupils are engaged by the lively delivery and opportunities for interaction. Better practice is embedding, but not all staff are skilled in judging an appropriate pace and this leads to some pupils losing focus.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Safeguarding procedures are sound and secure, with meticulous records and closely monitored, rigorous procedures. Since the last inspection further refinements have been made with the guidance of the trust. The school's work in this area has improved markedly since the school was judged to require special measures.

The site continues to be secure, with high levels of supervision, providing a safe environment for pupils. Staff are on hand to guide structured play and help pupils negotiate occasional fallings-out. Up-to-date training ensures staff know how to keep pupils safe.

Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to their learning; no disruptions to learning because of poor behaviour were observed. Older pupils recognise and appreciate the improvements in behaviour over time and cite the house points system as something which motivates them to do well. Behaviour is well managed by staff, although sometimes teaching assistants need to ensure they do not accept less good behaviour in sessions they lead.

Pupils appreciate the need to work hard and are developing greater resilience in the face of difficulty. However, presentation of work is variable and handwriting is not consistently cursive or neat, especially when pupils are writing at length. This is because teachers do not uphold consistent expectations.

Leaders have taken a robust line to tackle the rare incidents of racist slurs which have occurred, and pupils are clear about what is right and wrong. The school's key values, known as 'respect', are well understood.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have continued to affirm and uphold the high expectations they have for staff and pupils. They form a strong team with different but well-balanced skills. Leadership at subject level has developed well in a short time and hence leadership is now more distributed. This has resulted in more staff taking responsibility for the school's improvement. A shift in culture is evident; staff now really do believe Abbey Woods' pupils can excel and deserve the chance to achieve. This is well illustrated by the willingness of staff to volunteer to run the new after-school clubs for pupils.

Parents appreciate the headteacher's efforts in maintaining his high profile and accessibility, as well as the individual support he provides to pupils and their families. Steps have been taken to encourage parents into the school, for example

for coffee mornings, to begin the process of including them as partners in their children's learning.

The rapid improvement board monitors the work of senior leaders closely and has useful information with which to hold leaders to account. Their procedures include frequent checks of the school's improvements and areas for development. As a consequence, they know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Trustees are aware that, while significant improvements have been made, they must maintain their focus on challenging leaders to secure better outcomes for all pupils, and for the most-able, disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability, in particular.

Staffing changes have meant that the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability has stalled. The newly appointed interim deputy head has worked quickly to put in place useful systems to identify, track and monitor pupils' progress, alongside a planned programme of intervention. Training needs have been identified for teaching assistants to develop their skills. A firm base has been established. Leaders must now ensure that these actions yield results, and that the handover to the new special educational needs coordinator is seamless. This should help to ensure that no more time is lost and that the gaps for pupils who have special educational needs or disability begin to close rapidly.

In early years, while most work is appropriate and well planned, this is not consistently the case. At times, children are not working towards clearly identifiable learning goals and do not make good progress. An assessment system is in place and external verification has confirmed that teachers' judgements about children are accurate. However, they are not used well enough to target what children need to do next. While the number of children gaining the expected standard is forecast to improve this year, the figure is still below national levels. The learning spaces do not clearly indicate what learning is taking place, which makes the purpose of activities unclear for children. The gaps for disadvantaged children are too great in one class because they have not had sufficiently well-targeted teaching to help them catch up. Actions, identified from the plan developed with the local authority adviser, have not been fully implemented. Leadership in this area has not been effective in securing improved outcomes for children. Senior leaders have plans in place to address this lack of progress by using external support, as well as drawing upon their own capacity to bring about improvement.

External support

The local authority adviser continues to provide valuable guidance to the leader of early years. However, this has not been fully acted upon. A strong working partnership with a local school provides useful support and opportunities for staff development. Nonetheless, it is important that staff get to see outstanding practice too. The trust is in the process of brokering some additional support from outstanding practitioners.