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Dr Sophina Asong
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Dear Dr Asong

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hassenbrook Academy

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures, following the inspection that took place in January 2016.

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 is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement 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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Thurrock. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2016

- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by:
 - routinely checking the impact of all interventions, especially in English
 - narrowing the gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of others.
- Improve outcomes in English for all pupils by:
 - ensuring that leaders check on the quality of learning rigorously in all classes
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments, especially in Key Stage 3
 - make better use of national curriculum programmes of study to build on the work that pupils have done in Key Stage 2
 - ensure that all teachers provide good role models for pupils in the way that they speak and write in standard English.
- Improve the leadership of special educational needs with urgency so that:
 - leaders track and monitor the progress that this group of pupils make
 - accurate assessment information is gathered and evaluated regularly
 - all interventions and support programmes are monitored to check their impact.
- Ensure that lessons and learning are not disrupted by poor behaviour and that the academy is a calm and orderly environment for all pupils.
- Make use of existing good practice in the monitoring of teaching to ensure that all subjects and departments are equally effective in this area.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 May 2016

Evidence

The inspector visited the school for two days. During the inspection, she observed the school's work; scrutinised documents and met with the consultant executive headteacher, the associate headteacher, the chair of the governing body, and representatives from the board of trustees and the local authority. The inspector also met with members of the senior leadership team to discuss the impact of actions taken to improve the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was reviewed, in particular in English and for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. The inspector observed parts of 12 lessons, jointly with members of the senior leadership team, and met with middle leaders. She scrutinised pupils' work together with the associate headteacher and two deputy headteachers. The inspector also spoke to groups of pupils about their behaviour and learning experiences in the school. A range of documentation relating to the school's performance and safeguarding arrangements was evaluated.

Context

Governors of the Hassenbrook Academy Trust are in advanced discussions with a local multi-academy trust about plans to complete a transfer by the end of August 2016. The current headteacher is on long-term sick leave. Working with the proposed new trust, governors appointed a temporary, consultant executive headteacher in February to oversee the implementation of the school's improvement plan. More recently, a temporary, associate consultant headteacher from another school in the trust has been assigned to strengthen further the leadership team during the transition to new arrangements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

After a period of considerable uncertainty, senior leaders have begun to improve systems to ensure that the school operates more effectively.

The school's improvement plan actions are now more directly linked to the improvement priorities identified at the last inspection. Challenging and measurable targets, with appropriate milestones to support effective reviews, are focused on the intention to secure rapid improvement. A leader is assigned to each action, with a named manager to monitor and evaluate progress towards targets to be achieved. Governors are fully aware of their role in overseeing the implementation of the plan, but they have yet to assign a linked governor to specific priorities to ensure rigorous accountability for improvement at all levels.

Many of the planned changes are at an early stage of implementation. Nevertheless, there are some encouraging 'green shoots' of progress matched to initial signs of improving standards and some recent improvements in the quality of teaching and learning for all pupils.

Under the new leadership team, the vision for improvement is clear. The emerging culture and ethos within the school are rooted in high expectations of staff and pupils' performance. Most staff say that they feel more involved now in the decisions taken and that they understand the urgency of the journey on the road to further improvement. They say that the executive headteacher is a 'powerful force' in the drive to place pupils' achievement at the heart of their work. The regular 'parent surgeries' she offers are opening doors to improved communication with parents and, in the words of one teacher, 'putting the academy back into the community'.

Checks on the quality of teaching and learning are now more frequent and rigorous. As a result, teachers are increasingly aware of what is expected of them. However, the raised expectations of teachers' practice are not applied consistently in all lessons.

Senior leaders are working closely with middle leaders to ensure that their reviews of teachers' performance are accurate and focused effectively on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time. Performance management changes include a greater emphasis on accountability, at all levels, for ensuring that pupils, of all abilities, do as well as they can. Revised systems are helping leaders and managers to better understand the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning across subjects and key stages. The information gathered is beginning to be used more effectively to provide individual programmes of professional development for staff who need additional help to improve aspects of their teaching.

Most subject leaders are now more confident about leading improvement in their areas. They feel better supported and know that they are being held to account more effectively for pupils' progress. In a few subjects, leaders have not yet established sufficiently rigorous systems to ensure that all staff meet the expected requirements.

The external review of the use of additional funding to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils has started through the reviews associated with the transfer of the school over to the new trust. However, it is not yet fully implemented. Nevertheless, leaders now have a clearer understanding of the interventions taking place and the difference these are making to the progress of pupils who are eligible for support through the funding. Leaders are now able to determine more effectively which strategies are working and those that need to be changed. A similar review has been commissioned to determine the impact of the school's interventions for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

Leaders have effective systems in place to keep children safe. The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum and for all pupils. The leadership team works closely

with teachers to identify best practice that can be shared and what needs to improve. However, there is still a distance to travel before all teachers reach the high standards expected. There is a particular need to focus on ensuring that the most-able pupils are challenged to do as well as they can, so that more of them achieve the highest grades in external examinations. This is because not enough teachers make sufficient checks on pupils' learning in their lessons to see whether the work is too easy for some or too hard for others. As a result, in too many lessons, pupils of all abilities are not making the progress they should, consistently, across all subjects.

Leaders have started to improve the way that they ensure that assessment is reliable by using external partners to moderate teachers' judgements of pupils' GCSE work in English. Consequently, there is more confidence that predicted outcomes for the 2016 examinations are secure. There is some evidence of more accurate assessment in the work seen in pupils' books, but the quality of teaching in this subject remains too variable.

Raised expectations are leading to pupils taking more pride in the way they present their work, but teachers' application of the school's marking policy is inconsistent. The most effective marking seen gives pupils very specific guidance on what they need to do to reach a higher level. In weaker examples, teachers' comments are too general, or answers are ticked with no further information offered on how pupils could improve their work.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is being reviewed. As a result of the review, information about effective strategies for working with this group is now more widely shared with subject teachers. The information is helping teachers to better understand how they can plan appropriately to meet the learning needs of these pupils, and so accelerate the progress they make.

Steps are being taken to ensure that the work planned for Year 7 pupils builds effectively on their learning from key stage 2. This is so that no more time is wasted in teaching the things they already know. Plans are in place to share expertise across staff teams, working in both the primary and secondary phases within the new trust, and so improve further their understanding of the curriculum at different key stages.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Most pupils and staff say that pupils' behaviour has improved since the last inspection. Although a few pupils do not always behave well in lessons, incidents of low-level disruption to learning are starting to reduce. In general terms, pupils' behaviour in lessons is often linked to the quality of teaching they receive. This view is supported by the comments pupils made when they met with the inspector during the monitoring inspection.

Working relationships between staff and pupils are generally positive and respectful. Pupils are polite to visitors and are eager to speak about what has improved. They say they mostly enjoy their learning experiences, but feel that some teachers are more effective than others in managing challenging behaviour in their lessons. As a result, behaviour patterns change according to the subjects being taught.

Some teachers do not demonstrate a good enough understanding of the difference between compliant behaviour and behaviour for learning. As a result, some pupils are not challenged enough by the work they are set and others fall behind.

Teachers' expectations of pupils' calm and orderly conduct as they move around the school are rising. However, the application of the school's behaviour policy is inconsistent and some pupils feel that this is why the inappropriate language of a few of their peers goes unchecked.

Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and know whom to go to if a problem arises. They are typically smart in their uniforms and most of them are punctual to lessons. Overall, attendance has improved. The gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of others is beginning to narrow.

School leaders are working on reducing fixed-term exclusion rates, but there have been two more permanent exclusions since the last inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

There are early signs that pupils are beginning to make better progress, although the variations between key stages, subjects and groups of pupils remain.

An analysis of assessment information for Year 11 pupils in English suggests that more pupils than previously are making better progress. Predictions for Year 11 GCSE examination outcomes indicate that the gaps between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and that of others are narrowing and that more pupils than previously will achieve five A*–C grades, including in English and mathematics. However, predicted outcomes continue to confirm that not enough of the school's most-able pupils will achieve the higher GCSE grades, which they are capable of, this year.

In line with the quality of teaching and learning observed during the monitoring inspection, the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing more rapidly in mathematics than in English. Predictions in GCSE mathematics, science and in humanities remain strong. Across other subjects, outcomes are more variable.

There is some evidence that the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is improving, albeit slowly, as a result of a focused review of the quality and impact of provision and leadership.

Additional support with reading and writing has been put in place for pupils who started in Year 7 with below-average literacy skills. It is too early to tell whether this has had a significant impact on the progress they are making overall this year.

Senior leaders have planned actions in place to provide more timely interventions for pupils who need extra help with literacy when they start at the school in Year 7 in September 2016.

External support

The proposed new academy sponsor and the local authority are working together effectively to support the transition to new arrangements. The consultant executive headteacher and the associate headteacher, both employees of the new trust, are supporting the progress the school is making under a service level agreement that was put in place soon after the inspection in January 2016. The support is sharply focused on the areas requiring the most rapid improvement. The foundations for improvement are being established appropriately across the school's work, but it is too early to evaluate the full impact of actions taken.