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Mr G Evans
Principal
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Dear Mr Evans

Special measures monitoring inspection of Halewood Academy

Following my visit with Jonathan Smart, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 to 8 June 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 fourth 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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 Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2015

- Swiftly improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good in order to raise the achievement of all groups of students, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in English and mathematics, by making sure that:
 - there are high expectations of what students can achieve, including the quantity, quality, care and presentation of students' work
 - students' attitudes to learning are consistently good
 - all staff, including those in the sixth form, regularly and accurately assess students' achievements so they set challenging work that matches the needs and abilities of all groups of students, particularly for disadvantaged students and boys
 - students' literacy and numeracy skills are developed effectively across all subjects
 - all teachers follow the academy's agreed policies and procedures for marking students' work and that clear guidance is given to students on how they can improve their work
 - students in the sixth form make good or better progress in vocational subjects.

- Rapidly improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - there is clear senior leadership responsibility for the leadership of teaching and a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching so that any inadequate practice is swiftly eradicated
 - accurate systems are established for assessing students' achievement to ensure that leaders can confidently check and measure how well their actions improve students' outcomes, including in the sixth form
 - heads of department, including those new to post, are rigorously held to account for checking and improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their areas of responsibility
 - the pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students so that the gaps between their achievement with that of others close quickly
 - governors hold leaders rigorously to account for improving students' achievement and the quality of teaching
 - the findings of the recent review of governance are quickly and fully implemented.

- Continue to implement current strategies to improve attendance, particularly in Year 11, so that it is at least in line the national average.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with governors, the principal, members of staff, pupils, students, representatives of the Wade Deacon Innovation Enterprise Trust (WDIET) and the local authority.

Inspectors talked informally to pupils at the beginning and end of the school day and during lunchtime. We visited a number of lessons and looked at pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups. Inspectors considered carefully a wide range of documentation provided by the school, including: information on pupils' progress; attendance records; school policies, particularly those relating to safeguarding, and the school development plan.

Context

There have been a number of changes to leadership and staffing since my previous visit. A new chair and vice-chair have been appointed to the governing body and the role of the vice-principal has been filled on a temporary basis by two assistant vice-principals from the WDIET. The new head of the mathematics department is now in post, along with a lead practitioner in this subject. The head of history is leaving at the end of this term and a new post, entitled head of humanities, has been created, to be filled by the current head of the geography department, with effect from the autumn term.

In total, 11 staff are leaving the school at the end of this term. Overall, almost half the staff working at the school at the time of the previous inspection have left and been replaced. Such turbulence in staffing is a direct consequence of school leaders' drive to improve the quality of teaching; nevertheless, it is understandable that this has been unsettling for pupils and their parents.

The school plans to be part of the Wade Deacon Innovation Enterprise Trust and the conversion date for this is expected to be 1 September 2016. The outcome of consultation on the future of the sixth form is that post-16 provision will cease from August 2017; students currently on roll in year 12 will be able to continue their studies at Halewood if they so wish.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

School leaders work as a highly effective team and their efforts have been rewarded by discernible improvement to many aspects of the school's work: this is a school that has turned the corner and the removal of special measures is now within its grasp. The commitment, enthusiasm and clear, strategic direction provided by leaders of the WDIET have been pivotal in changing the culture and climate for

learning. As a result, there is a shared ambition across the school for further improvement: this is a very different school to the one I first visited a year ago.

The principal has shown considerable dedication to his mission to improve this school. He has been particularly successful in ridding the school of inadequate teaching; his determination to do so is now bearing fruit and teaching has improved substantially since the previous inspection in April 2015.

The impact of the departure of the vice-principal has been mitigated by the support of two highly competent assistant vice-principals from Wade Deacon High School who have provided invaluable expertise and advice. School leaders are also taking steps to ensure that the school continues to grow its own capacity, in terms of leadership, by enhancing the skills of existing senior staff.

Subject leadership has been strengthened further since my previous visit. Promising new leadership of mathematics has invigorated this area of the curriculum and there is already some evidence of positive impact. There is now a very strong team of middle leaders of English, mathematics and science at the heart of the school. These leaders crackle with high expectations of both staff and pupils; in combination with the large turnover in staffing, they have been hugely instrumental in dispelling the culture of low aspiration that had plagued the school for some time.

Performance management has been sharpened. One example of the impact of this development is evident in the improved effectiveness of teaching assistants. The school's self-evaluation of its work is broadly accurate and the school development plan is appropriately focused on improving teaching and outcomes; however, school leaders have not devoted sufficient attention to planning for improvements to attendance. As a result, pupils' poor attendance unfortunately remains a stumbling block to the removal of special measures.

As at my previous visit, leadership and management of the pupil premium is starting to show some improvement. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the educational achievement of disadvantaged pupils. School leaders have introduced innovative approaches to raise the aspirations of the most able disadvantaged pupils and there are the early signs of impact of higher expectations. However, there remains a legacy of underachievement because of poor leadership in the past and, on the whole, disadvantaged pupils still do not do as well in this school as they should.

The governing body goes from strength to strength; governors have improved in confidence immeasurably since my first visit and they are unflinching in holding the school to account. The executive monitoring board is a force to be reckoned with: insightful, exacting and ambitious, members of this group have injected vital urgency into proceedings and have been immensely influential in driving improvement.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective, with some examples of exemplary practice. All governors and staff have now had training in the 'Prevent' duty. School leaders are tenacious in their support of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Unfortunately, the responses they receive from other agencies in order to support such pupils are not always as timely or as effective as they might be; school leaders are justifiably frustrated when weaknesses in other services threaten to let pupils down.

The outcome of the consultation regarding the future of the sixth form has assuaged the concerns of students that were voiced during my previous visit. The sixth formers that I spoke to this time seemed pleased with the decision and happy that they are now free to concentrate on their studies, without the diversion of worries about their immediate future.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

During this visit, inspectors observed lessons in a range of subjects, mostly in key stage 3 because pupils and students across the rest of the school were involved in public examinations. While improvements to teaching have been less pervasive in key stage 3 than in the rest of the school, there is nevertheless incontrovertible evidence that teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 is of a much better standard than at the time of my first visit.

The improvements to the quality and effectiveness of marking have continued apace. The large majority of teachers apply the school's policy consistently and effectively. When inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in books, it was clear that teachers' comments play a strong role in helping pupils improve their work and pupils spoken to confirmed this point of view.

Teachers' marking helps to develop pupils' literacy skills. Many examples were seen of pupils being given the opportunity to write at length and, for the most part, pupils present their work neatly. Teachers' questioning has also improved and pupils were often seen to answer cogently and articulately, demonstrating a good grasp of the subject under discussion.

Nevertheless, some teaching still requires further improvement. The huge turnover of staff has led to a dependency on temporary teachers whose work has not been monitored effectively. This has been compounded by poor attendance of a minority of permanent staff. As a result, pupils cannot always rely on having the same teacher, or being given work that is appropriate to their needs and abilities. These factors contribute to pupils' disaffection which sometimes manifests itself as low-level disruption.

Across the school, all subject leaders are now in the process of rewriting schemes of work with the intention that they build more effectively on what pupils have already learned at primary school. It has been most helpful that subject leaders have been

able to visit a good local primary school, of which the vice-chair of the governing body is headteacher; in this way, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do has been raised. This is a promising development as there is still some teaching, particularly in key stage 3, which is insufficiently challenging, especially for the most able pupils.

Teaching in general continues to make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, during the visit, in a geography lesson, the teacher encouraged pupils to consider the implications of the prevailing religion of a country in terms of what one could wear when visiting on holiday; pupils showed maturity and respect for others as they considered this issue. However, it is regrettable that the excellent standard of art work that is produced by pupils and students in the sixth form does not have a higher profile. It is only displayed in a very limited area of the school and all pupils would benefit by having the opportunity to enjoy this work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils spoken to during this monitoring visit said they feel safe and that school leaders take a 'zero tolerance' approach to all forms of bullying, including that of a racist or sexist nature. Pupils feel proud of their school, particularly as they see it is improving. The vast majority of pupils dress smartly and arrive at school punctually, with their equipment, ready to learn.

Attitudes to learning are improving. This is because the quality of teaching is generally so much better and, for the most part, teachers follow the behaviour policy more consistently. In most classrooms, teachers have established effective routines for pupils to follow that allow lessons to proceed smoothly and productively. On the rare occasions where behaviour is not good, it is generally because the teacher has failed to impose high expectations and pupils take advantage, particularly when they are taught by someone who is not their own teacher.

Attendance requires urgent improvement. The rate of persistent absence is far too high and, routinely, almost ten per cent of pupils are not in school on a daily basis. It is absolutely undeniable that unless pupils attend school more regularly they will not reap the benefits of the improvements to teaching that have been so hard won. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is particularly weak and is a major impediment to their achievement.

The rate of exclusion has continued to rise. In general, this is a consequence of the consistent application of school policy. However, it is of concern that some pupils are not responding more positively to strategies to improve their behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are improving quickly. Predictions for Year 11 pupils taking their GCSEs represent a considerable improvement on previous years' results: the school is set to be above floor standards for the first time in two years. Students in the sixth form are also set to achieve better results than in the past. The partnership with WDIET has been immensely beneficial in that all teacher assessments are regularly checked for accuracy, so the school can be confident that these predictions are realistic.

Pupils are set to continue the strong performance in English that was achieved last year. However, there is a long legacy of poor teaching in mathematics that remains an obstacle to rapid improvement in this subject; this is another factor that militates against the removal of special measures.

Pupils' achievement in key stage 3 is improving because of better teaching. Weaknesses in the curriculum have hindered some pupils' progress in the past but school leaders have implemented changes so that this will no longer apply. The curriculum has been strengthened so that many more pupils will have the opportunity to take a suite of academic subjects, including English Literature, which was not always the case in previous years.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils is still not good enough. Disadvantaged pupils are set to achieve better qualifications in their public examinations this year than previously; however, across the school their achievement has not improved at as fast a pace as that of other pupils. It remains the case that, although this group of pupils achieve well in English, in other subjects they are far behind their peers, both in school and nationally.

Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make better progress in key stage 3 than in key stage 4. The gaps between these pupils' progress and that of other pupils in school are narrowing quickly in English but they are trailing behind their peers in mathematics.

The most able pupils make good progress in English because teaching is consistently of high quality in this subject, but they do not achieve as well as they ought to in mathematics. These pupils benefit from the increasing level of challenge that they receive in a number of subjects but this is still not consistent across the school.

External support

The school continues to benefit from intensive support, challenge and direction from the WDIET. The contribution of the WDIET has been the single most important factor in securing improvement. The local authority also works highly productively

with the school through regular reviews of its progress and attendance at meetings of the executive monitoring board.

Priorities for further improvement are as follows:

- urgently improve attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils
- improve the impact of expenditure of the pupil premium so that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils accelerates and equals that of their peers
- embed current improvements in mathematics so that all pupils achieve as well as they ought to in this subject
- reduce the high rate of exclusion
- embed current improvements to teaching in key stage 3 so that all pupils, particularly the most able, are challenged sufficiently in all subjects.