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Ms Sylvia Thomas
Interim executive principal
The Baverstock Academy
501 Bells Lane
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Birmingham
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Dear Ms Thomas

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Baverstock Academy

Following my visit with Rob Steed, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24 May and 9 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 the school is not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the regional schools commissioner, the chair of the interim academy board and the director of children's services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics and science, so that the progress and attainment of all groups of students, especially disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs, improves rapidly by:
 - ensuring that teachers receive good training and support to set appropriately challenging targets for students and to assess accurately their progress in lessons and over time
 - ensuring that the long-term assessment information and the ongoing assessments from lessons are used continually to plan and teach lessons at the right level for different groups of students
 - making sure that teachers mark books frequently enough and in a way that informs students about their successes and the next steps they need to take
 - consistently and effectively challenging low-level disruption so that the focus is on learning in all lessons
 - ensuring that the curriculum in the LEAP provision closely mirrors that in the mainstream part of the academy so that students do not fall behind with their preparation for examinations at the end of Year 11.

- Improve leadership and management so that all actions drive improvement in students' achievement by:
 - establishing a clear basis on which to set challenging targets for all students to enable them to make good progress
 - ensuring that leaders and managers at all levels frequently and rigorously analyse the progress that all groups of students are making in all subjects, including in Years 7 and 8, identify where and why there is underachievement and take carefully planned actions to put this right
 - implementing a rigorous system to evaluate the quality of teaching throughout the academy, using information about students' progress as well as observations and scrutinies of students' work, and putting in place appropriate strategies to improve teaching where this is needed
 - analysing more thoroughly other information gathered in the academy, such as attendance and behaviour data, and using this to target actions in a more focused way
 - minimising the use of part-time timetables for LEAP students in line with government guidance and ensuring that correct exclusion procedures are followed if it is necessary for a student to be removed from the academy site for disciplinary reasons

- reviewing the frequency with which BIC students integrate into the main academy
- ensuring that governors receive clear, analytical reports on students' progress and behaviour and the quality of teaching so they can be more effective in challenging and supporting the academy.

An external review of governance and an external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 24 May and 9 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and the school's website and met with leaders, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke by telephone to the chair of the interim academy board, the district leader of the Birmingham Education Partnership and the principal of Ninestiles Academy. Inspectors observed parts of 16 lessons, including in mathematics and science, all of which were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' books and visited form-time sessions. Inspectors reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding, English as an additional language and special educational needs.

Context

The executive principal and special educational needs coordinator were absent during the inspection visit. Since the last monitoring visit the interim executive principal, who was appointed from December 2015, has announced that she will be leaving on 9 June 2016. A new interim executive principal has been appointed by the Department for Education to take on the role from 10 June 2016. The chair of the interim academy board, which was established in January 2016, has resigned and was replaced by another member of the board in May 2016 shortly before the inspection visit. It was not possible for inspectors to see any teaching in Year 11 as pupils were taking GCSE examinations.

The school's provision for pupils at risk from exclusion, entitled 'Learn, Engage, Achieve, Progress' (LEAP) has now been taken into the mainstream of the school, as has its provision for newly arrived pupils learning English as an additional language, formerly known as Baverstock in the City (BIC).

Outcomes for pupils

The school's projections for GCSE results in 2016 indicate that expected standards will be lower than in previous years, particularly in mathematics and science. This is despite rapid improvements since the Year 11 mock examinations in all subjects carried out in December 2015 when projections were exceptionally low. Since then the number of pupils projected to achieve at least five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics has doubled but still remains very low compared to national expectations.

The proportions of pupils currently in Year 11 who, according to information provided by the school, have made or exceeded expected progress since the start of Year 7 are also likely to be very low in mathematics and science.

Again, there has been rapid improvement in the progress pupils in Year 11 are making since the interim executive principal was appointed in December 2015. However, the gaps with national expectations remain too high to have closed sufficiently in the limited time from January to June 2016. Outcomes for pupils are set to be better in English and closer to national expectations as the quality of teaching has been consistently better over time than in the other core subjects. The school is confident that projections are now more accurate than previously as a result of a rigorous process of internal and external moderation.

Year 11 pupils continue to retain their increasingly unrealistic targets based on their previous outcomes at the end of Year 6 in primary school, as these have remained unchanged. This has led to some pupils being targeted for A and A* grades at GCSE but currently working at much lower grades than these. One pupil spoken to summed up the views of others when he said, 'We don't take our targets seriously.' Pupils know what their targets are and the grades at which they are currently working. However, very few who talked to the inspectors could say how they could achieve higher grades, other than by 'trying harder' and 'behaving well'. One notable exception seen by inspectors was in history where pupils in Year 10 taking the GCSE course clearly understand the criteria for each grade and the subject-specific content required to achieve higher grades.

In mathematics, projected improvements in GCSE have been secured through booster classes and combined teaching groups, drawing on the strongest teaching to mitigate against staff absence. The interim executive principal has led by example in taking on a significant teaching responsibility in mathematics.

In science, additional targeted support has led to increased projected outcomes since December 2015, although progress in lessons over time remains highly variable. Evidence from pupils' books and pupils spoken to confirmed this variation.

Significant gaps in outcomes and projected outcomes at GCSE remain for different groups of pupils including disadvantaged pupils, speakers of English as an additional language, pupils who have special educational needs and disability and boys. The school has achieved some recent success in reducing the percentage of pupils who are below their expected age in reading, but the proportions who are behind in each year group still remain very high. Leaders recognise that pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding for this academic year has not been targeted well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is not yet improving quickly enough. There are still too few examples seen of teachers setting work that takes account of pupils' different starting points and which provides a sufficient degree of challenge. In some instances in mathematics pupils were given low-level unchallenging work, whereas in science the level of difficulty and language used was too high for some groups of pupils.

There was little evidence seen during the inspection of teachers targeting work at specific pupils, although teachers now have detailed lesson plans and profiles of their pupils including those who are on the special educational register. However, some teaching assistants were deployed effectively to support individuals and groups of learners.

In other mathematics and science lessons seen there was a good level of pace and challenge in lessons. In some instances pupils new to learning English as an additional language were placed appropriately in higher sets so that they could be set challenging work matched to their ability in the subject rather than to their level of English language proficiency. This enabled them to make more rapid progress.

Teachers demonstrated their good subject knowledge, including in art, French, history and physical education, by setting challenging questions to pupils of all abilities and starting points. For example in a Year 10 French lesson, questioning through the target language was skilfully adjusted to stretch the most able linguists but also adapted to encourage those who found learning the language difficult to participate.

In a number of lessons seen, teachers focused on literacy through the introduction and reinforcement of key subject-specific words. Elsewhere there were missed opportunities for pupils where they were not actively engaged in tasks, especially those learning English as an additional language, to share their understanding with others verbally.

Teachers observed set high standards of conduct and expectations of pupil behaviour in lessons. There was very little low-level disruption seen. Pupils spoken to, especially those in lower and middle sets, reported that some lessons continue to be disrupted either as a result of teachers unable to control classes or because there has been a high turnover of supply and cover teachers. Conversely those in top sets, in mathematics for example, reported that their lessons have not been adversely affected and they were pleased with the quality of teaching and the progress they were making.

Instances of supply and cover teaching remain. The school continues to be hampered by the financial notice to improve which prevents it from making permanent appointments. There remain some mathematics teachers who are not subject specialists but the department is ably supported by members of the senior team who are highly experienced in teaching the subject.

Regular training is now in place for subject leaders and all teachers. Plans for further training in English as an additional language have been implemented. Some teachers still lack confidence in teaching pupils with special educational needs and disability.

Teachers comply with the school's policy over green and purple pen marking and provide opportunities for pupils to review their own work and that of their peers. The quality of written feedback from teachers to pupils remains very variable, however.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Increased monitoring has ensured a greater degree of consistency in the implementation of the behaviour policy. In the short term there has been an increase in exclusions as expectations of behaviour have been raised. However, pupils continue to report that behaviour has improved in the school, coinciding with the arrival of the interim executive principal, and the consistent application of sanctions and rewards.

There were no serious incidents of misbehaviour seen in lessons during the inspection, although pupils reported that poor behaviour in some lessons still happens. Pupils observed by inspectors conducted themselves well and there were very few incidents of low-level disruptive behaviour seen. Almost all pupils behaved well in and around the building, although inspectors experienced one isolated incident where pupils directed foul language towards them in the corridor. Pupils spoken to confirmed that where incidents do occur, leaders take swift and effective action. The new systems put in place are having a positive impact in significantly reducing the number of reported behaviour incidents.

Pupils spoken to said that the school is improving. They are positive about the tighter rules for behaviour in and out of the classroom. Pupils now look smarter. They like the mix of sanctions and rewards but feel that more rewards would encourage them to behave better. They reported that where there are rare incidents of bullying, these are dealt with effectively by staff. They reported that they feel safe and secure in school.

In lessons seen pupils were keen to ask questions and showed a high degree of enjoyment and maturity, for example handling equipment during a lesson on pop art and showing enthusiasm for languages when learning French. In some lessons a few pupils remained quiet and compliant but they did not switch off or stray off task.

Attendance is low overall and is especially low for some groups of pupils learning English as an additional language. There have been recent improvements but attendance remains well below national figures. In some classes visited by inspectors, especially in lower sets, the level of attendance was poor. A new system has been introduced successfully to improving punctuality, which had previously been identified by the school as a concern.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim executive principal has continued to have a significant impact in the short time she has been in post. She has raised the morale of the whole school community, including parents, and overseen improvements in behaviour, teaching and outcomes. However, the announcement of her departure during the inspection visit and that of the chair of the interim academy board has led to further uncertainty about the school's capacity to improve. The constraints imposed by the financial notice to improve and a lack of a sponsor to take the school forward has meant that leaders have been unable to make the long-term decisions needed to ensure the future of the school. While it has been possible to make adjustments to teaching groups, it has not been possible to carry out a restructuring of the senior leadership team and departments in the current financial position.

Despite the challenges, there has been a degree of improved stability to staffing although subjects such as mathematics still rely on some supply and cover teaching. A new system has been introduced to monitor teaching with a focus on learning outcomes for pupils. Individual support plans have been set up where required. The teaching and learning policy has been revised. All teaching staff have now been observed as part of the school's performance management system. There are also regular and systematic reviews of pupils' work now taking place. Arrangements have been established for staff coaching and a programme of professional training has begun for teachers to share best practice.

In joint observations of lessons with inspectors and members of the senior leadership team there has been a high level of agreement about the strengths and areas for development seen.

There remain inconsistencies in the quality of leadership in subjects and aspects but a course for middle leaders, which has just started, is seeking to ensure a greater consistency in what is expected of middle leaders. This is still in the early days of development.

Leaders now have a more detailed and accurate analysis of how well individuals and pupil groups are doing. They know where gaps are and which groups need to catch up from Year 7 onwards. Information is more accurate following recent rigorous moderation of test results with a local outstanding school.

Leaders have continued to set highly challenging targets for pupils and have been previously slow to intervene when pupils were at risk of not achieving them. Leaders are now taking action more quickly from Year 7 onwards to identify those pupils falling behind, but this is in its early stages of development.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective and the school complies with its statutory responsibilities. The current policy has been revised and meets up-to-date requirements.

Previous decisions made concerning the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding mean that funding has not been well targeted and has not had sufficient impact in closing attainment gaps.

The interim academy board has been strengthened through the appointment of highly experienced and knowledgeable professionals in education. They receive more detailed information on the progress of different groups of pupils. However, they have also been constrained from making the necessary long-term strategic decisions to secure the future of the school.

Leaders have taken determined action to improve the provision for pupils learning English as an additional language. The school recognises that the nurture group was having limited impact and that pupils at times were placed inappropriately in sets on the basis of their English rather than their ability in the subject. Revised assessment procedures for pupils learning English as an additional language, including where possible assessment in their home language, have ensured that pupils are now more likely to be appropriately placed in the right sets.

In the continued absence of the special needs coordinator the school has made necessary arrangements to ensure all statutory requirements for these pupils are met. Leaders have ensured that pupils are now supported in lessons by learning support assistants who are effective in supporting individuals' needs. Some teachers lack confidence in planning for these pupils' needs.

External support

The school is now receiving support from a local successful school which has moderated assessments of pupils' work and provided training for middle leaders. Baverstock is now an active member of the Birmingham Education Partnership and engages with networks including for art and gifted and talented pupils as well as engaging in sharing panels. Baverstock has sought external support for English as an additional language and plans are in place with Aston University for a mentoring programme to start next term.