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Mrs Jackie Powell
Headteacher
Perry Beeches III the Free School
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Dear Mrs Powell

Special measures monitoring inspection of Perry Beeches III the Free School

Following my visit with Rob Hackfath, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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 local governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham City

Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate students' underachievement and ensure their good progress in all subjects by making sure that all teachers know how, and take action, to:
 - assess students' work accurately and use this information well to identify where there are gaps in learning
 - plan work which addresses weaknesses and builds on earlier learning, avoids too much repetition and is at the right level of difficulty for students
 - give clear instructions to students and check their understanding before they start work
 - tell other adults who are supporting the lesson what they should do and which students they should work with to make sure that all groups of students, but particularly the disadvantaged and disabled students and those with special educational needs, quickly catch up with their peers.

- Take prompt and decisive action to improve students' reading skills by:
 - repeating checks on reading ages for all students to identify those who need more intensive support when they start in the school and those whose reading skills may slow as they move through the school
 - introducing a programme which teaches the weakest students to read and ensures they read books that are at the right level for their stage in reading
 - training sixth form students and other adults in the use of phonics strategies (the sounds letters represent) so that they know how to help students in paired reading sessions.

- Implement a whole school approach to numeracy so that students are given every opportunity to apply and to improve their skills across other subjects.

- Improve leadership by introducing more accurate checks so that leaders at all levels, including governors, have an accurate view of the school and the areas that need to improve by:
 - using teacher assessment information in the separate subjects of English and mathematics more strategically, so that leaders know how much progress is being made from individual starting points by groups of students and how this compares with others in the school and nationally
 - using teacher assessments and information on the progress being made by students to inform judgements being made on the quality of teaching
 - checking students' written work is set at the right level of difficulty
 - checking the quality of teachers' marking in students' books.

- Improve the way in which targets are set for all teachers and, when successfully achieved, are used to reward the best teachers and leaders by:
 - using the teachers’ standards and career expectations to make sure targets set are sufficiently challenging
 - using information on the progress being made by students in teachers’ classes, in subject areas, in year groups or whole school, as appropriate to the teacher’s role in the school.

External reviews of governance, and of the school’s use of the pupil premium and catch up funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, other members of staff, groups of students, members of the local governing body, and representatives of Perry Beeches The Academy Trust.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one of the former joint headteachers has resigned following an investigation by the Education Funding Agency into the management of the trust. Leadership continues to be provided by the other former joint headteacher, who is the executive headteacher across the trust. The current associate headteacher has been appointed permanent substantive headteacher from September 2016.

Former trustees and members have stood down in the light of the investigation, and have been replaced by new externally recruited members and directors. An interim chief executive officer, an internal appointment, oversees the trust's management. Relationships between the trust and the local governing body are being redefined for school accountability through a new scheme of delegation. The local governing body has recruited the headteacher of a local school as a new non-executive governor.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and other senior leaders have guided the school calmly through a period of significant turbulence and media scrutiny following resignations of the joint headteacher and trust. Parents and pupils have been kept fully and openly informed of developments and, as a consequence, their views of the school have remained overwhelmingly positive. The staff too, many of whom are newly or recently qualified, remain very positive about the support for their professional development provided by the school and trust. Monitoring and support for teaching remains a strength.

Changes in leadership across the trust and the school have begun to develop the capacity for accurate and constructive self-evaluation. The new chair of the trust and its directors have set the tone and established a new culture in this respect by requesting leaders, for the first time, to complete a self-evaluation summary review. The self-evaluation process has been informed by subject reviews, which have begun to 'drill down' into the reasons behind different rates of progress between different subjects. These reviews do not always sharply explore performance across different pupil groups. Nonetheless they are a marked improvement on the previous

approach which did not sufficiently probe data which might have suggested any shortcomings.

Governors, for the first time, have begun to use detailed information about school performance to robustly question and challenge school leaders in governing body meetings. Governors say they have felt empowered by recent training in their roles and responsibilities. The monitoring and improvement group (MIG) visits to the school have been targeted on following up specific areas for improvement. Their reports are clearly informing governing body discussions. As governors become more confident in their roles, they will now be able to request specific monitoring information of school leaders prior to their meetings. Meetings of the governing body have, appropriately, become more frequent to enable them to carry out a fuller role in evaluating the school's progress.

The strengthening capacity for self-evaluation across the school bodes well for sustained improvement in the future. However, these processes are very new and yet to fully embed. In particular, the relationships between the newly formed trust board and the local governing body, around responsibilities for school improvement and the use of resources, still need clarification.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Lessons are typified by very constructive relationships between staff and pupils, and these underpin pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils of all abilities show much resilience where they find tasks demanding; they want to succeed and do well. Weak literacy skills remain a constraint for many, though, across a broad range of subjects. The provision to support and improve literacy, therefore, continues to be refined and developed. Intensive reading and literacy programmes, well-delivered by a skilled team of assistant teachers, have continued to accelerate rapidly the reading ages of those who receive specific interventions, including those with special educational needs. Removal of pupils from mainstream classes for such interventions, however, does have an adverse impact on their learning in the lessons from which they are withdrawn; leaders are aware of the need to keep the balance of such interventions under review. The provision for general reading is strengthening as the library stock is enhanced and organised. This enables all pupils to read regularly and tackle progressively more challenging texts. Teachers plan opportunities well for pupils to apply their number skills in a range of topics.

The most able pupils have benefited from an improvement in the process of setting targets since the last monitoring visit. Targets are now more regularly reviewed, and aspirational targets set to increase challenge where appropriate. Pupils generally respond well to teachers' comments on how to improve their work and extend their skills and knowledge, especially in English and mathematics. In subjects beyond the core, though, this is less consistent, so that some work remains unfinished and errors are repeated. While much successful work goes on beyond the school day in booster classes and homework clubs, the effectiveness of the use

of homework across subjects to extend pupils' learning is inconsistent.

Teachers' planning to support pupils' progress has improved markedly since the previous section 5 inspection through the consistent application of a whole-school, trust-wide assessment system. This system has been based on the levels system associated with the old national curriculum. There is a recognition of the need to move quickly to a new system that is more aligned to new national approaches to assessment at key stages 3 and 4. The introduction of this new system for September 2016 will be a logistical and training challenge. Nonetheless, teachers have ensured that pupils are well-prepared for their GCSE programmes, some of which have made a successful start.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' personal development remains a strength of the school. Pupils are very reflective about global issues facing the world around them. They are strong advocates for the school's values of respect and tolerance of diversity. They readily take on positions of responsibility and are increasingly involved in giving their views and taking decisions about the operation of the school. The use of the behavioural sanctions of exclusion and detention continues to fall. Pupils say that the rewards system gives them much encouragement to behave positively and constructively. Attendance and punctuality remain high.

Outcomes for pupils

Since the previous monitoring visit, strengths in pupils' progress in mathematics have been sustained. School leaders have focused well on addressing remaining gaps in progress between different groups of pupils and between different subjects.

Subject reviews into English and history have identified the key elements of pupils' literacy skills that constrain their progress. In these subjects, pupils often demonstrate a good understanding of the themes and concepts underlying, for example, key texts or historical episodes. A significant proportion of pupils, nonetheless, still find difficulty in articulating their views clearly and precisely in writing. These subjects are, therefore, focusing with increasing success on ensuring that pupils are fully equipped with the basic skills to read with understanding and write well. They are helped by general approaches to improving literacy that continue to yield success. Pupils across years 7 to 9 who receive the school's intensive reading programmes have made significant gains in their reading ages over eight months of support.

The recommendations of the external pupil premium review have now been implemented in full. The appointment of academic mentors for those disadvantaged pupils supported by the additional funding of the pupil premium, including those who are the most able, is reported by the school to have been successful. It has led to the identification of strategies to overcome the specific barriers to learning for

individuals. As a result, school information indicates that progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others across the school have narrowed markedly since the last monitoring inspection. The progress of the most able pupils has been accelerated through their 'aspirational targets'; pupils speak favourably of these in ensuring that work remains challenging and interesting in most lessons.

Pupils who have already begun GCSE options in technology subjects have made a strong start, and are already demonstrating a good awareness of design and industrial processes.

External support

New leaders of Perry Beeches the Academy Trust are just beginning to set in place arrangements to address weaknesses in accountability reported in the last monitoring letter. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

As at the time of the last visit, staff and leaders have continued to benefit from close working with other schools in Perry Beeches The Academy Trust, especially in terms of teacher training, continuing professional development and the moderation of assessments. The appointment of headteachers to the governing body and trust board, from schools outside the trust, should enable links to be usefully broadened for staff and leaders. These should allow leaders and other staff to gain a valuable external perspective on the effectiveness of their work.