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28 November 2016

Tim Byford  
Interim Principal  
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Dear Mr Byford

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Bath Community Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 9 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 academy's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive principal, the interim principal, the chair of the academy council, the chief executive officer of the Cabot Learning Federation, members of the senior leadership team, the head of mathematics, and pupil members of the school council. The trust's statement of action, which incorporates the school's improvement plan, was evaluated. The single central register of employment checks was scrutinised.

### **Context**

Since the inspection of May 2016, the Cabot Learning Federation has begun a process of consultation on the planned closure of Bath Community Academy. The Department for Education is expected to make a final decision on the academy's future very soon. A new interim principal was appointed in September 2016. A previous head of mathematics returned to the post, also in September 2016.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the academy**

School leaders are maintaining momentum in their drive for improvement, despite the uncertainty surrounding the school's future. They are determined to establish and hold on to a culture of positive morale, mutual respect and better outcomes for all pupils. Their actions are, on the whole, effective and having a positive impact. Nonetheless some significant challenges persist.

The academy council and senior leadership team welcomed GCSE results in 2016 that confirmed their predictions of better results than in the previous year. Almost two thirds of pupils left the school with a grade C or better in both English and mathematics, a step up from very low attainment in 2015. Overall progress measures were also more encouraging, showing better achievement for different groups, including disadvantaged pupils. The small number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who joined the school as high achievers made the strong progress expected from their starting points and attained well as a result, including in English and mathematics.

The school's analysis of the achievement of the most able disadvantaged pupils is significantly improved since the last inspection when there was no specific tracking of this group. School leaders now attend closely to these pupils' learning and expect teachers to monitor and report on their progress, as well as that of other identified groups. This heightened awareness is not yet leading to universally better learning, however. Pupils' books still show learning and achievement that are good for some, patchy for others.

Book sampling of some of the most able disadvantaged pupils' work during this inspection showed that pupils who start at the same level of understanding do not necessarily continue to achieve equally well. A comparison of pupils' work in the same year group and subject, but different classes, confirmed that teachers' expectations differ and so, therefore, does the quality of work pupils produce. In some subjects pupils understand how much progress they are making and how to improve; in others they are unclear.

Poor attendance means that some pupils have large gaps in their work, much of which is left incomplete, with no evidence of support for them to catch up. In too many books, work shows little care. Marking and feedback is still too variable in quality. The result is uneven and unequal achievement. Better practice, such as in English and geography, where books often show that pupils are able to extend and deepen their understanding, thanks to high-quality feedback and advice from teachers, is not widespread. Mathematics books too often have little work of a quality and depth that would be useful to consolidate learning or to revise from for an examination.

The new leader of mathematics is working closely to the school improvement plan to tighten systems for tracking and monitoring progress. This includes clear plans

for collecting and analysing information from the department's teachers about pupils' progress, and the implementation of more rigorous systems for checking how well pupils perform in examinations. For example, the department will compare mathematics grading with other schools in the federation and participate in a national pilot to test out new assessment systems.

These external checks are positive developments, but internal monitoring is underdeveloped. It is not clear how leaders satisfy themselves that teachers' day-to-day evaluation of pupils' progress is accurate, or whether pupils in all years are successfully developing, deepening and applying their mathematical knowledge and skills. Mathematics results improved in 2016, but achievement remains vulnerable because of the uneven quality of teaching, assessment and feedback.

Pupils are strongly supportive of new approaches to behaviour and bullying that they say are making a difference. Sanctions for poor behaviour are more rigorous and more effective. An internal ban on visible mobile phones has significantly reduced the incidence of cyber bullying. Pupils welcome positive approaches to their safety, such as trained 'anti-bullying ambassadors', and strategies to promote friendship and reconciliation. The next inspection monitoring visit will confirm whether these initiatives have had the intended lasting and powerful impact, but they are a good start.

Attendance is still stubbornly low for too many pupils and significantly and persistently low for a core group. The vice-principal is leading fresh strategies to combat absence, ably supported by the special educational needs coordinator. Senior staff have a keen understanding of the challenges, including medical issues, facing the core group of lowest attenders and work tirelessly with their families and outside agencies to help these pupils back into school. Pupils are highly appreciative of rewards for good attendance and the drive to reduce absence that is now a constant theme of school life. The school's attendance figures are significantly affected by the instability caused by the threat of closure. Senior leaders are rightly assiduous about not removing pupils from the register until they are safely enrolled in new schools, but this inflates absence figures in the interim.

Senior staff with responsibility for safeguarding have tightened procedures for reporting concerns about pupils' safety and for recording actions taken to ensure that all pupils are protected from harm. They are quick to involve the relevant agencies if help is needed and they have improved record-keeping of the impact of their actions.

The academy council is working carefully to ensure that the proposed closure of the school does not distract its members from the urgent task of improving attendance and achievement for all current pupils. They welcome the upturn in results in 2016 but are under no illusions about the challenges facing them in securing further improvement in the current climate of uncertainty.

Council members reviewed their understanding of pupil premium funding and its impact immediately following the last inspection. Despite the rise in achievement for this group in 2016 they are, rightly, not yet satisfied that their current progress is good enough. They have commissioned a further, external review, to test more rigorously and objectively whether provision for disadvantaged pupils is as good as it can be.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy council, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bath and North East Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Raeside  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**