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Mr M Farmer
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Dear Mr Farmer

Special measures monitoring inspection of Queen Elizabeth Humanities College

Following my visit with Derek Barnes, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 16–17 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 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.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. This is subject to consultation with me regarding the department involved.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently increase the impact of leadership and management at all levels to secure rapid and sustained improvements in pupil outcomes by:
 - ensuring governors receive training, so that they have the necessary skills to challenge leaders and hold them to account for the performance of the academy
 - setting clear targets in improvement planning, so that the success of leaders' actions can be measured in terms of their impact on outcomes for pupils
 - continuing to review and refine the deployment and monitoring of pupil premium funding, so that it is used effectively to close the gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others
 - monitoring rigorously the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, including that of different groups of pupils in all year groups, so that underachievement is identified and arrested swiftly
 - strengthening the skills and abilities of middle leaders in monitoring pupils' progress in their areas and in checking the work of their teams
 - ensuring that information on pupils' attainment and progress is accurate in all subjects
 - making sure that all staff have read and are fully conversant with statutory guidance to keep children safe
 - drawing on leadership support from good and outstanding schools in order to build leadership capacity.

- Improve teaching so that the progress of all pupils, and all groups of pupils, continues to accelerate by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - planning lessons and setting activities that take into account the prior knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils and enthuse them to do well
 - ensuring that all teachers have the confidence and skills to respond to how well pupils are learning and adapt their lessons accordingly
 - ensuring that pupils act on teachers' feedback to improve their learning and work
 - sharing best practice in the academy so that all teaching matches that of the best.

- Urgently improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - raising the achievement of all pupils and groups of pupils, including that of disadvantaged pupils and the most able
 - ensuring that pupils achieve well in all subjects, and by reducing gaps in pupils' attainment and progress between subjects.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16–17 November 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, inspectors evaluated the school's work and held meetings with the headteacher, school leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, staff and members of the governing body.

Inspectors observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects across the school and were accompanied by senior leaders on some visits to lessons. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. Inspectors met formally with pupils on two occasions and discussed behaviour, how they learn to keep themselves safe and what it feels like to be a pupil at Queen Elizabeth Humanities College.

Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's action plans, an external review of the governing body and information about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance. There were insufficient recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection visit in June 2016, two teaching posts have become vacant. One vacancy has been successfully filled for the start of next term, and a temporary appointment has been made to the other. Associate staff have undergone a process of restructuring. The secondment you made to the senior leadership team is continuing this year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher, other leaders and governors continue to tackle effectively the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in October 2015. The headteacher describes their approach as similar to the way an architect would work: creating secure foundations on which successful systems and processes are built which will last well into the future. It is clear to inspectors that such an approach is being followed, and that early laid foundations are starting to reap rewards. Staff continue to work hard and support changes at the school, and leaders are rewarding and celebrating their effective practice.

Leaders regularly and comprehensively monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the school. They collect information from a wide variety of sources, including observing lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and outcomes of assessments. Leaders now analyse this information in detail and, as a result, have a clear and accurate picture of how well teachers are doing. There remains some variation in the application of some school policies and expectations, and leaders continue to focus

on improving consistency.

Senior leaders plan teacher training sessions well. These sessions are informed by detailed analysis following their observations of teaching, and are closely linked to the school's strategic priorities. As a result, teachers' development is having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. During the inspection, it was evident that teachers are applying their learning from recent training sessions in the classroom. Leaders also ensure that development opportunities are responsive to the needs of individual teachers. They utilise bespoke coaching and mentoring when required, for example, by forging links with colleagues in other schools who teach the same subject.

Middle leaders are rigorously held to account by senior leaders when performance and outcomes in their areas of responsibility are not as expected. The 'raising achievement process and plan' system provides additional scrutiny for actions and their impact. It also identifies what support may be required in order to get things back on track. Additionally, senior leaders are implementing a series of faculty reviews which aim to further the involvement of middle leaders in planning the strategic direction of their subject areas. As these reviews have only been introduced this term, it is too soon to judge their impact.

Middle leaders are increasingly managing their areas of responsibility effectively. They demonstrate their command of pupils' assessment information by presenting their analysis to senior leaders. Discussion identifies pupils, particularly in Year 11, who require additional intervention to make the progress expected of them, and subsequent evaluation of how successful these strategies have been. Middle leaders know which groups of pupils are key to the school's success.

Governors continue to become more assured in their use of information that leaders provide about the school, particularly pupils' progress information and progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified in October 2015. They are clear on the school's strengths, and the reasons as to why some areas require improving. As a result, the governing body accurately evaluates the progress the school is making towards the removal of special measures, and provides effective challenge and support to leaders.

Link governors have developed close associations with particular key strategic areas of the school, for example safeguarding or the provision for disadvantaged pupils. They collect detailed evidence of the work staff do and summarise this for other governors. Consequently, governors have a high level of awareness of the work of the school. This ensures that the clear targets contained within the school's action plan continue to be met in a timely manner. Some link governors were able to participate in key meetings as part of this inspection, demonstrating their ethos of high commitment and involvement in supporting the school.

The required review of governance has been completed by a national leader of governance and its findings reported to the governing body. The review includes evaluation of the work of the governing body since it was restructured and additional governors were recruited. The review makes several recommendations for further action, including revisiting the governors' statement of action and how recent training can benefit a larger number of governors. The review's author will monitor the governing body's response and evaluate its actions.

Leaders continue to successfully implement actions in response to the external review of the use and impact of the pupil premium which was completed in January 2016. Strategies to support disadvantaged pupils are appropriate, and these now take into account feedback from parents and pupils. Leaders carefully track interventions and their impact through a provision mapping system, and the link governor challenges leaders well using these highly detailed records. The positive effect of actions to support disadvantaged pupils is reflected in better attendance rates and improved outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective. All staff make sure that protecting pupils from harm and supporting vulnerable pupils are high priorities. Procedures to recruit staff are thorough and rigorous. Staff, including those new to or temporarily at the school, are trained appropriately in child protection and safeguarding issues. Staff understand these duties and understand the necessary up-to-date knowledge to ensure that pupils are safe. The robustness of safeguarding systems, the capability of those responsible for them and the appropriateness of their actions were apparent during the inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders continue to prioritise improving teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors concur with leaders' assessment that teaching is improving. However, the quality of teaching remains variable in some subjects as teachers embed leaders' expectations into their practice.

Pupils say that their teachers know them well, and feel this is a real strength of the school. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils when planning lessons to now include opportunities for pupils with high attainment and faster rates of progress to tackle more challenging work. They also anticipate when additional support may be needed for pupils starting from a lower point, or who are finding work too challenging. Pupils comment that they find themselves working on tasks with different levels of challenge from their peers in an increasing number of their lessons.

Teachers are responding well to recent development sessions that focused on the quality of questioning they use. Inspectors saw pupils' responses being used to inform discussions and explanations, and other pupils then learning from their classmates' answers. Sometimes teachers do not always follow up their initial questions when some pupils, particularly low prior-attaining boys, provide fewer comprehensive oral responses.

Teachers are continuing to improve the impact that the school's marking policy is having on pupils' progress. The written feedback teachers provide makes it clear to pupils how to improve their work. Pupils are increasingly being given the opportunity to respond to these comments in lessons. However, the responses pupils make, and the impact these have on improving their work, are currently less effective for pupils with low prior attainment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

In lessons, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are largely positive. Pupils' conduct at social times reflects their respectful and polite nature. This is reinforced by pupils stating that poor behaviour, inappropriate language and bullying are rare. Pupils comment that on the rare occasions when bullying happens they have full confidence that staff will deal with it quickly and effectively.

Pupils enjoy school and appreciate the help and support that they receive. They are clear about how to keep themselves safe in a wide variety of situations, including from radical and extremist views. They know there are key people at school they can talk to if they have concerns about their safety and welfare, or those of their peers.

A home/school liaison worker successfully creates close and consistent links with families in order to improve pupils' attendance. This work has continued to reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school reported following the last monitoring inspection. However, these improvements have been uneven across year groups. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 remains below that of similar pupils in key stage 3 and other pupils nationally.

Pupils are clear about the consequences of poor behaviour in school, and leaders use exclusions appropriately and sparingly as a sanction. The numbers of exclusions are monitored and their effectiveness evaluated. Pupils contributed to the development of the new house points system and describe how this motivates and rewards positive conduct and work.

Outcomes for pupils

The work being done to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and to accelerate pupils' progress, had a very positive impact on examination results in summer 2016. Leaders' analysis of provisional results demonstrates positive improvements in progress and attainment. For example, pupils made on average one third of a grade more progress than all pupils nationally, and the proportion of pupils achieving good GCSE grades in English and mathematics improved from 2015. Additionally, differences in outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils nationally had disappeared. However, variation in progress remained between boys and girls, and in some subjects.

Leaders regularly collect information about the progress of pupils currently at the school. Recent analysis indicates that the progress made by disadvantaged pupils continues to match that of other pupils. Boys' progress is comparable to that of girls lower down the school, but some differences remain for pupils currently in Year 11. Senior and middle leaders continue to use the information they collect to provide successful additional support for pupils who require it in order to make the progress expected of them. For example, specialist staff provide valuable support for pupils who start Year 7 with low literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, many of these pupils make enough progress to catch up with their peers by the end of the year.

Leaders continue to take steps to improve the reliability of the assessment information that they collect. Predictions for pupils' examination results in 2016 were more realistic than in 2015, but some discrepancies remained. In subjects where predictions were less accurate, leaders ensure that teachers have access to information from examination boards and use external support to moderate and validate assessments. Leaders recognise how changes to the structure of GCSE assessment will affect predictions until there is national evidence available about pupils' attainment. They continue to refine their assessment systems as more information becomes available.

External support

Leaders and teachers continue to benefit from the support of two national leaders of education (NLEs) commissioned by the governing body. This provision remains effective in supporting actions that focus on school improvement priorities. Governors who are members of the evidence review committee continue to consult one NLE to validate their evaluation of the progress the school is making to address the areas for improvement. The other NLE has recently confirmed the progress made by leaders responsible for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The culture of leaders and governors continues to be open and outward-facing, encouraging the challenge and rigour provided by external support. Leaders are quick off the mark to respond to the outcomes of reviews and consultations. As a result, the external support provided continues to support leaders to strengthen processes and procedures which are starting to have a demonstrable impact on the school's overall effectiveness.