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Mr W Henry
Principal
CUL Academy Trust
69 Aston Road North
Aston
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West Midlands
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Dear Mr Henry

Special measures monitoring inspection of CUL academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

It is strongly recommended that the school does not 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 Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, leaders, managers and governors must put right the weaknesses in the academy's safeguarding procedures. They should:
 - make sure that a disclosure and barring service check is carried out for everyone who does not already have one, including temporary staff and members of the governing body, and that the required information is recorded on the academy's single central record
 - amend the policy for safer recruitment to include the following requirements: every interview panel must include one person who has been trained in safer recruitment; the names of all members of the interview panel are recorded; and any person on an interview panel may not supply a reference for any applicant for the post in question
 - make sure that those members of staff who have not completed training in the use of restraint do so as soon as possible
 - make sure that instances of the use of restraint are recorded in a bound book with numbered pages.
- Strengthen the impact that leadership, management and governance have on all aspects of the academy's work by:
 - making sure that all of the policies and other documents that guide the academy's work are based on accurate information that is specific to the academy, and that governors discuss and agree their content before they are published
 - analysing information about students' attainment, their personal development and the quality of teaching
 - presenting the information to governors so that they can hold leaders to account and decide, with senior leaders, where improvements are needed
 - amending the academy's improvement plan to include these priorities
 - checking that targets for improvement are challenging yet attainable
 - making sure that self-evaluation is accurate and based on robust evidence
 - reviewing the roles and responsibilities of staff, in particular those of senior leaders, to make sure that workloads are manageable
 - recruiting additional governors with suitable experience and the expertise to help drive the academy forwards
 - making sure that the website includes the information specified in the academy's funding agreement.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that students' progress improves by:
 - developing teachers' accuracy in assessing the levels students are working at and in making predictions about the grades they are likely to reach in external examinations, for example by checking their assessments with teachers at other schools
 - making sure that all lessons start promptly
 - insisting that teachers check that students are reading with understanding when they are reading by themselves
 - increasing the quantity and range of reading materials available to students.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 30 November 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and vice-principal. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of the governing body as he was not available for a meeting in school. No other governors were available to meet. The inspector spent time in lessons, where she spoke to pupils and looked at their work.

Context

The principal has returned to school on a phased return after a period of long-term absence through ill-health and is now in school for four days each week. Since the previous inspection, one temporary teacher has been given a permanent contract and a new permanent teacher has also been appointed. Two other teachers have joined on a temporary basis. There were only 18 pupils on roll at the start of September but by the time of the monitoring inspection there were 34.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The significant gaps in staffing that were reported on in the previous monitoring inspection persisted throughout the summer term. Senior leaders have prioritised finding suitable teachers for each subject. This has proved challenging, but leaders are pleased with both the permanent and temporary appointments they have made. During the inspection, it was evident that new staff are building positive relationships with pupils and with each other. A vice-principal has been appointed to lead the improvement of teaching and learning from January 2017.

Leaders and staff have managed the recent influx of new pupils well. The school is calm and pupils have settled in quickly.

The outcomes from the examinations taken by Year 11 pupils in the summer term were poor, which the principal readily acknowledges. Outcomes were severely affected by the gaps in staffing during the summer term, but also the quality of teaching in the two previous terms. Some subject-specific analysis has taken place to identify aspects that caused pupils to gain lower grades than predicted. For example, the science leader notes that pupils often struggle with, or are reluctant to engage in, extended writing in any subject. In addition, in all subjects, pupils often tend to find the process of sitting a formal examination difficult. The principal has given some thought as to how to address these issues, but there is no clear plan or systematic approach.

Leaders have begun to look more closely at the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are bringing pupils' work to weekly staff meetings to discuss, which they

report is stimulating useful professional debate. The principal is visiting lessons, and he has asked a consultant to observe all teachers. Consultants and the principal are also carrying out scrutinies of pupils' work. However, the purpose and focus of these activities are not clear and the findings are not being used to plan the next steps for staff in terms of training or development.

The principal has formed links with a local partnership of schools and with individual schools. Some of these links are providing staff with the opportunity to see practice outside CUL Academy, which is valuable. However, beyond this general aim, the purpose of the links is not clear. Leaders agreed during the monitoring inspection that a clear priority was to set up professional links to help teachers to ensure that assessment is accurate and to moderate their judgements of the standard of pupils' work. The principal still does not have a mentor or equivalent to help him to develop his own leadership.

The vice-principal has developed a training plan for safeguarding. Staff are receiving frequent training on a range of relevant issues. The vice-principal keeps careful records of who has attended each training session, or completed training online. Staff on the school's reception are well aware of potential security issues when admitting visitors to the building. The physical intervention policy has been re-written, importantly by involving staff in discussion about the school's principles and practice. The policy still needs some refinements but is much improved. New staff have been appointed following interviews with suitably trained leaders and governors. However, some weaknesses remain in the way in which references are checked once they are received by the school.

Two new governors have joined the governing body since the previous inspection. The chair of the board has completed a training course designed for members and chairs of boards of trustees. Governors have been unable to come into school for discussions and feedback for the last two monitoring inspections. However, a scrutiny of governing body minutes and a discussion with the chair indicate that governors have little knowledge of the examination results from the summer. Meetings focus on aspects such as finance, policies and interactions with the Education Funding Agency, and sometimes rightly on safeguarding. However, there is no focus on the quality of teaching and learning and the outcomes for pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Both new and established staff are working well with all pupils. For the new pupils, staff are working out what skills and knowledge pupils have in the subject being taught and starting to plan appropriate work to fill any gaps. Sometimes a lack of information and work from the pupil's previous school hampers teachers' work. Pupils are sometimes understandably frustrated when they have to repeat work that they feel they have already done. In the lessons visited during the inspection, pupils were mainly working well and demonstrating positive attitudes to learning. Some

show a clear desire to achieve good grades in their examinations and apply themselves accordingly.

The leader of assessment continues to collect assessment information from teachers on a half-termly basis. Where pupils appear to be underachieving, discussion takes place about what interventions are necessary. However, there is still no robust process to ensure that the assessments themselves are accurate, a priority for the school given the lack of accuracy of predicted examination grades in some subjects in the last academic year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

During the inspection, the school was calm and generally purposeful. Pupils socialised pleasantly with each other at break and lunchtime. Routines for moving between classes are well-established. Most pupils were in full uniform. They were mainly polite and pleasant to staff and visitors. No pupils have been excluded from school on a fixed term since the previous inspection.

Attendance remains low, at around 79%. This term it has fluctuated from week to week as new pupils have joined the school, many with previously very low attendance. The school's records show that this term, a third of pupils have attendance which is at 95% or above. However, persistent absence remains very high, at around 50%. The school continues to monitor attendance rigorously, carry out daily home visits and involve other agencies. Many pupils are frequently late for school, something which leaders continuously challenge, with some impact.

Outcomes for pupils

The examination results for Year 11 pupils in 2016 fell way below the outcomes that the school had predicted. Attainment was considerably lower than in 2015.

No pupils gained five GCSE passes at grades at A* to C. In mathematics, 36% of the 23 pupils gained a higher grade; 27% did so in science. Ten pupils took the after-school options of citizenship and hospitality, of whom five gained a higher grade in citizenship and one in hospitality. No higher grades were gained in English, art, or physical education. Many of the same pupils who gained A* to C grades in up to three subjects attained F or G grades for their other subjects, which represented significant underachievement. Just under half the pupils attained five GCSE passes at A* to G.

All pupils who left CUL Academy in 2016 gained a place at college or at a training provider. For some, their attainment limited the level of course that they could access. College staff and employers are being invited into school at an earlier point this academic year to try to engage pupils and raise their aspirations.

The curriculum offer at key stage 4 has previously limited pupils' outcomes because the range of courses they could take in the school day was small. This academic

year the school has been able to employ a business studies and information communication technology teacher, so these subjects have been added back into the curriculum. It is intended that current Year 10 and 11 pupils will be able to take examinations in more subjects than Year 11 pupils could in 2016. Functional skills examinations are being taken earlier so that pupils can gain qualifications and confidence, as well as examination practice.

In English, the pace, volume and quality of pupils' work are improving. Previous weaknesses in teaching in English mean that there is a long way to go to ensure that pupils can be successful in their examinations in 2017. The principal plans to employ an additional part-time English teacher to support pupils who need it.

External support

The school benefited from the support provided from Aston Manor School in the summer term, particularly to help pupils to complete their art and English GCSE work. The principal has begun to negotiate support from a local partnership of schools.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that monitoring activities have a clear purpose and that any areas for development that are identified are then followed up.
- Make sure that all assessment, particularly the half termly assessment, is accurate, moderated with colleagues in other schools, and analytical.