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Mr Ken Mackenzie
Acton High School
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Dear Mr Mackenzie

Special measures monitoring inspection of Acton High School

Following my visit to your school on 19 July 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Tiplin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management so that:
 - the school’s safeguarding and child protection practices meet the requirements of the most recent government guidance
 - a culture of vigilance is embedded throughout the school and all members of staff fully understand their role in safeguarding children, putting this understanding into practice
 - the school’s assessment systems accurately record pupils’ progress from their starting points across a range of subjects
 - leaders, governors and teachers review pupils’ progress information regularly, acting promptly to reverse any underachievement for groups of pupils
 - the school uses the additional funding it receives to support disadvantaged pupils effectively, and complies with statutory guidance on reporting the impact of this funding on the outcomes of pupils
 - middle leaders are fully accountable for pupils’ outcomes in their subject areas, swiftly tackling underachievement and promoting rapid progress for all groups of pupils
 - the curriculum meets the needs of all groups of pupils in the school, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and provides pupils with effective careers advice and guidance
 - members of staff consistently follow the school’s policies, and leaders monitor this closely, including the accurate and timely completion of the attendance register
 - governors are fully and accurately informed about all aspects of the school’s provision and hold leaders to account robustly and in a timely manner.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that outcomes for pupils increase swiftly by ensuring that:
 - teachers’ planning is well matched to pupils’ needs and abilities, providing appropriate challenge so that all groups of pupils make at least good progress from their starting points
 - pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate support so that they make at least good progress from their starting points
 - teachers accurately assess the current progress of pupils
 - leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning accurately and use this to plan the support they give to teachers, so that the school meets teachers’

professional development needs effectively.

- Improve the behaviour of pupils at the school by ensuring that:
 - the school’s behaviour policy is fully and consistently implemented so that poor behaviour is eradicated and pupils have positive attitudes to learning
 - pupils arrive punctually to school and to lessons, and any incidents of lateness are followed up quickly and effectively
 - pupils show respect to each other and to adults, and behave well when moving around the school site between lessons, and at break- and lunchtimes.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order 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 ascertain how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- It is recommended that the school should only appoint newly qualified teachers after discussion with HMI in the London region.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 19 July 2017

Evidence

This first monitoring inspection focused on the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding and pupils' behaviour. The school's sports day was being held on the day of the inspection. Years 11 to 13 were not in school. The inspector met with the headteacher, and senior and middle leaders with responsibility for aspects of the school's strategies for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. The inspector also met with a group of staff, including teaching and support staff, and two groups of pupils from Years 7 to 10. The inspector toured the site and observed pupils and staff leaving the school to make their way to the sports day venue. The inspector visited the school's inclusion unit, Transform, and the medical room. The inspector scrutinised documentation including: external reviews of governance, safeguarding, the school's use of pupil premium funding and wider school improvement; the statement of action and the school's action plans; policies and procedures relating to the behaviour and safety of pupils; behaviour and attendance information; the school's admissions register; records of plans and actions to support vulnerable pupils; the single central record of pre-employment checks made on staff and a sample of staff files; and fire safety and health and safety documentation, including the welfare (medical and accident) log.

Context

Since the last inspection, two new deputy headteachers have been appointed. There are now three deputy headteachers with discrete responsibilities for teaching and learning, outcomes and inclusion. By September 2017, a total of 26 new staff will have joined the school, including those replacing staff who have left. The local authority and leaders are working with a multi-academy trust to sponsor the school's conversion to an academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have taken prompt and effective action to improve the school's safeguarding arrangements. Consequently, the school's safeguarding arrangements are now effective. The new deputy headteacher has worked quickly with the headteacher and the inclusion (Transform) team to improve and integrate the previously ineffective strategies. A culture of vigilance is now evident in the school's work.

The Transform team now leads on all aspects of the school's pupil welfare work. This includes the designated safeguarding team, the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and support for pupils at risk of falling behind in their learning. Links are being made between pupils' achievement, and personal development, behaviour and welfare so that support is timely and bespoke. Weekly support plan action (SPA) meetings provide regular and routine

opportunities for staff to review the effectiveness of support for pupils and establish suitable plans for emerging concerns. Leaders are more accountable for pupils' welfare as a result of these meetings and clearly defined roles. Appropriate and targeted external support is well used to help pupils who need it. Staff's understanding of pupils' performance takes into account all information that the school has. Leaders, including middle leaders, reported that they feel enabled to support pupils' welfare and performance more effectively because expectations, procedures and support strategies are in place. Staff and pupils also reported to the inspector that communication has improved significantly so that their awareness and understanding of support are clear. They understand whom to go to with specific queries or concerns, which are promptly followed up.

Leaders have thought carefully about how to introduce new systems to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding improve. New measures are introduced only where gaps existed in the past. This has kept systems for identification, reporting and responding to concerns simple and effective. A new anonymous online reporting system is an example of this approach and one that staff and pupils reported has been useful. Pupils now feel able to report concerns relating to themselves and others. Staff have received useful and effective training and as a result, their responses to disclosures are consistent with school policy and their ability to spot signs of risk has improved. The curriculum now supports pupils' well-being and pupils' understanding of risk is secure. For example, pupils could discuss with clarity the risks around local stranger danger, radicalisation and emerging risks online. Recent visits to the school by external workshop provision have been highly effective in helping pupils understand their rights and responsibilities to one another, including in conflict avoidance and resolution. Leaders recognised that a culture of casual sexism had gone unchecked in the past and have subsequently addressed the problem. Female pupils reported to the inspector that they now feel safer and restorative actions have improved relationships.

Administrative deficiencies identified in the previous inspection report have been resolved so that child protection files and records relating to vulnerable pupils are detailed and accurate. Leaders have improved attendance systems so that the afternoon register is taken after lunchtime and truancy is quickly addressed. Records of pre-employment checks are suitable and well organised. Prompt remedial actions following the February inspection have ensured that the administration of medication, and storage and replacement of out-of-date supplies are precise. Pupils who need first aid receive timely help from qualified members of staff. Staff accurately record all welfare-related incidents on a single document so that leaders can see whether any trends emerge that might indicate wider or linked concerns. However, the inspector found that the same precision did not extend to the administration of the school's records for all pupils who leave the school mid-year. While there is no evidence that children are missing from education and the school's work with the local authority in this regard is secure, leaders accept that the filing of documents relating to pupils who are taken off roll needs to match the same level of rigour as other safeguarding records.

The external review of governance identified the need for governors to reorganise the structure of committees so that due care and attention can be paid to all areas of the school's work. This is ongoing and due to be in place for the start of September 2017. However, governors have been proactive in improving their skills and knowledge of the school's work. Governors now understand their responsibilities regarding pupils' welfare and leaders produce regular reports enabling governors to more effectively scrutinise the school's safeguarding arrangements. However, governors must ensure that they challenge leaders effectively and precisely in all aspects of the school's work, using sharply focused information about the performance and welfare of all groups of pupils.

The school has worked closely with the local authority towards becoming an academy. Work in this regard has been timely and appropriate.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' personal development and welfare have been improved because of the prompt steps taken to secure the effective arrangements for safeguarding. For example, pupils enjoyed a recent workshop, which focused on conflict avoidance and resolution, respect and tolerance. These events improve behaviour because pupils are provided with strategies to work through their differences and resolve past conflicts.

Leaders have introduced effective strategies to improve behaviour. They raised expectations for pupils' conduct around school and set the expectation that staff follow the same straightforward routines for managing behaviour. The 'Acton Way' represents the school's ethos and expectations and is the bedrock of leaders' strategies to meet the ASPIRE aims (achieve, stand together, persevere, imagine, respect, excel). Former barriers to promoting good behaviour, such as congestion points during lesson changeover, segregated playgrounds and a lack of celebration of pupils' achievements, have been remedied. The headteacher has raised the profile of subjects such as the creative arts so that pupils' talents are rewarded and recognised. Pupils and staff perceive behaviour to have improved because pupils know what is expected and meet those raised expectations most of the time. Staff are more consistent in the application of behaviour procedures and do not simply ignore the issue or seek to shift the responsibility. Pupils also told the inspector that teachers have more respect for them. Leaders have introduced a new protocol of restorative conversations that is improving relationships and removing barriers to pupils' progress. Pupils behaved well as they waited to depart for sports day off site. Pupils were compliant and staff stuck rigidly to the planned routines. Leaders planned the day with meticulous attention to detail.

Leaders' plans for September, including the introduction of a new school uniform and mixed-age tutor groups, aim at improving the integration of pupils from different backgrounds, ages and abilities. Pupils feel that the diversity of the school's community is a strength. However, in the past there has been segregation

between groups of pupils and a lack of effective action to improve pupils' desire to attend school. Leaders recognised that a history of poor teaching, ineffective behaviour systems and low expectations needed to be addressed so that pupils are inspired to attend regularly and aspire to achieve well. Leaders understand that there is more work to do to improve behaviour to the point where fights are very uncommon. Likewise, their aim is to help pupils become self-regulating in their actions around the school. Leaders are currently redeveloping the system for logging and analysing behaviour incidents. This means that leaders are currently unable to assess fully the effect of strategies to improve behaviour. The information available indicates that poor behaviour is not yet uncommon and some poor behaviour risks undermining the work done to secure pupils' welfare. Leaders deal appropriately with extreme incidents, sometimes by using exclusion. The number of exclusions remains high. Leaders also identify that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are disproportionately involved in behaviour incidents. Leaders have devised an action plan to improve further the behaviour systems. Leaders aim to develop staff's consistency in their use of the behaviour protocols and their accurate logging of behaviour incidents, and to improve the identification of pupils' needs.

External support

Leaders promptly sought appropriate external support to address some of the immediate issues around safeguarding and pupils' welfare. An external review of safeguarding was completed in March 2017 and was accompanied by leaders' self-assessment of safeguarding using an external provider. External reviews of governance and use of the pupil premium concluded in April and May respectively. These have provided useful feedback that has shaped the school's improvement plans. External reviews have helped define leaders' plans for discrete areas and have contributed well towards refining the whole-school action plan. A further external review took place in May 2017 to assess the school's improvements since February more broadly and included a review of governance and safeguarding. The local authority has undertaken regular visits to the school; for example, in June they checked the suitability of the school's strategies to effectively support newly qualified teachers. The local authority is actively supporting governors in holding leaders to account for school improvement and brokering the transition towards academy conversion. The local authority and leaders have planned an ongoing schedule of external reviews up to April 2018, focusing on the following areas: the effectiveness of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; governance; disadvantaged pupils' progress; and safeguarding.