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8 September 2017

Miss V Buckland
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Dear Miss Buckland

Special measures monitoring inspection of Castle Hill Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 5 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 academy'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 September 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2016.

- Improve leadership by ensuring that:
 - leaders at all levels use information about how well pupils are doing to identify the most important actions that are needed to bring about improvements in teaching and learning
 - the assessment system supports teachers in planning to meet pupils' needs, so that pupils make consistently good progress
 - leaders, including governors, rigorously monitor how the pupil premium funding is spent so that it has a greater impact on the progress and the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in the school
 - middle leaders develop their skills to support and challenge teachers effectively to improve outcomes for pupils
 - actions taken to improve attendance are effective and lead to attendance which is at least in line with the national average
 - teachers and teaching assistants receive the training and support they need to address weaknesses in their subject knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics
 - leaders make accurate judgements about what skills and knowledge children have when they enter the early years so that teachers can build effectively on what children know and can do.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to enable pupils to make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can do
 - teachers use information about what pupils know and can do to plan activities which consistently meet their needs
 - feedback given to pupils helps them to improve their work and make good progress.

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 governance may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 5 July 2017

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with your senior leadership team, members of the academy trust and a governor to discuss the impact of your work on improving the school. I sampled a range of pupils' work and conducted a tour of the school with senior leaders. I spoke with your inclusion team and the leader responsible for monitoring the impact of the pupil premium. I met with a group of pupils and scrutinised some of your pupil assessment records. I looked at your improvement plans and the response to the external review of the pupil premium.

Context

Since the last inspection, your deputy headteacher and three other teachers have left the school, and others are due to leave at the end of the current year. You have re-organised the senior leadership team. Governors have well-advanced plans to re-broker the school's academy arrangements with a different multi-academy trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You have tackled the challenge of changing the culture of expectations which existed at the school at the time of the previous inspection. You are nurturing those members of staff who have risen to the challenges faced by the school and those who are showing promise and developing their skills. At the same time, your determination and clear messages for improvement and the need for change have ensured that those who could not accept these challenges have left or are about to leave.

Your plans for improvement and the statement of action provided by the academy trust are fit for purpose. You have used the more accurate performance information derived from improvements in assessing pupils to decide how to tackle weaknesses. The statement of action sets high expectations for progress towards the removal of special measures. However, we agreed that, as your pupil assessments have become more accurate, there is a need to include more specific and short-term success criteria for pupils' progress in your plans.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was commissioned promptly after the last inspection. Its findings underlined the need to use resources more effectively to challenge pupils of all abilities and set higher expectations. Your most recent assessment information demonstrates that there are signs of increased progress among this group of pupils. However, you know that you must use this information with more precision to decide on measures of success.

The work of middle leaders is beginning to have a greater impact on pupils' outcomes. You have recognised latent talent in some existing leaders and brought

this to the fore. For example, your leader for the pupil premium has rapidly developed skills necessary to evaluate the impact of additional funding on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Middle leaders told inspectors that they feel more confident in challenging teachers to improve as a result of the training they have received, more reliable pupil performance information and more systematic arrangements for the monitoring of teaching.

You recognise that the development of the wider curriculum has been delayed by the recent focus on improving core subjects. The pace of improvement in subjects such as science, history and geography needs to accelerate.

Leaders in the early years are ensuring that children benefit both indoors and outdoors from more structured and sustained opportunities to develop their skills. For example, additional adults question the most able children skilfully to help them delve more deeply into activities on offer. You have placed an emphasis on the accurate use of spoken English in both questioning and talking with children. This is leading to more confident speakers and better opportunities for children to learn to read and write.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils said that teachers' explanations in lessons are now easier to understand. The most able pupils are provided with work which engages their interests more deeply and stirs their curiosity. They told inspectors that some teachers go 'outside of the box' to make lessons appealing and accessible. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning have improved. Pupils recognise that making mistakes and trying out new ideas are not things to be avoided, but they are encouraged as part of the learning process.

Senior leaders work to develop teachers' use of questioning is successful in ensuring that activities are being adjusted to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers now have more accurate and better-organised information about pupils' progress. They use this to plan more effective lessons.

You have provided a more effective range of reading resources and reorganised the way in which reading comprehension is taught. For example, the 'read and report' process introduced in reading lessons is helping children to delve more deeply into the characters and plots of fiction texts.

Examples of pupils' writing sampled during the inspection demonstrate that they are beginning to incorporate some aspects of effective writing that they have learned from reading more widely and more deeply. For example, the most able pupils are using paragraphs more effectively to organise their writing. The wider range of opportunities for children to develop their early writing skills in the early years is leading to more substantial progress for children who have weaker starting points.

The improved arrangements for sharing information between the early years and Year 1 are helping improve the quality of the curriculum for children who are late in attaining a good level of development.

Leaders have been less successful in securing the necessary improvements to the teaching of mathematics. Teachers are trying harder to incorporate opportunities for the most able pupils to deepen their understanding and reasoning skills. Pupils' work shows signs that the training that teachers have received in the use of practical resources to help them calculate is beginning to bear fruit.

Your specialist support teachers for speech and language are offering effective guidance and support to help teachers tackle weaknesses in pupils' use of language and vocabulary.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The attendance of pupils who have been the subject of intensive intervention has improved. You have focused sharply on celebrating and recognising improvements in attendance. However, overall attendance and persistent absence remain a concern. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains well above the national average for similar schools. Your inclusion team has had some success in tackling barriers that have prevented those with the poorest attendance from coming to school regularly.

The behaviour and attitude of pupils towards their learning have improved and you are right to be proud of turning this around. The greater consistency with which teachers apply the behaviour policy and improvements emerging in the quality of teaching are contributing to this success.

Outcomes for pupils

You recognise that many pupils continue to work at standards which are lower than those typical for their age. However, their progress is improving so that differences between the attainment of current pupils and that of others nationally are diminishing.

The proportion of children on track to attain a good level of development by the end of the Reception year has improved. Your more accurate assessment of children's starting points has enabled you to demonstrate that this represents improving progress for most children.

Pupils' progress in writing, particularly that of those who are most able, is improving. Recent work sampled on inspection shows that pupils are able to sustain accurate spelling and grammar in extended pieces of writing in different genres.

The work you have done to improve teachers' skills in helping pupils learn phonics

has had some impact on increasing the proportion reaching the expected standard by the end of Year 1.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those which are related to speech and language, are making much better progress.

Pupils are making better progress in accurately calculating and becoming more confident in solving problems. However, the most able pupils, in particular, are yet to make sufficient progress in developing their mathematical reasoning skills.

External support

You are positive about the regular and robust challenge which governors provide as you tackle the many areas which needed attention this year. The decision to engage external partners to check the accuracy of your revised assessments of pupils' achievement has been particularly significant in securing improvements seen so far. The academy trust has provided challenge and support from a position of strong knowledge and understanding of your school.