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Mr Stuart McLaughlin
Principal
Bower Park Academy
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Dear Mr McLaughlin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bower Park Academy

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 December 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 school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the school improvement plan focuses on specific activities and includes measurable outcomes that will allow governors to hold leaders at all levels to account for their impact on the achievement of pupils
 - improving how pupils' progress is monitored, particularly at key stage 3, and how leaders are focused on progress from starting points as a basis for judging the quality of teaching over time
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders are consistently effective in their roles
 - ensuring that leaders and governors routinely evaluate pupil premium expenditure so that it is focused on activities that improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able
 - ensuring that systems for managing attendance and behaviour provide information so that leaders can identify any emerging trends and patterns for different groups of pupils
 - refining how teachers' performance is evaluated by focusing on the progress that pupils make when judging the quality of teaching over time.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that outcomes for pupils significantly increase, particularly in mathematics and science, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use the information they have about pupils' starting points to plan learning activities that challenge pupils, including the most able, to achieve the grades of which they are capable
 - all teachers using the school's assessment policy to give high-quality feedback to pupils so that they are clear about what they have to do to improve their learning
 - all teachers demonstrating the highest expectations of what pupils should be learning appropriate to the age and stage of their education
 - developing effective opportunities for pupils to practise and deepen their mathematical skills across the curriculum.

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

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

The inspector met with the principal, senior and middle leaders and a group of staff. The inspector also met with the chief executive officer of the trust and with the chair of the interim transition board. The inspector visited 10 lessons, jointly with leaders, across different subjects and year groups. During these visits to lessons, the inspector looked at pupils' work and spoke to them to evaluate the quality of their learning. He met with two groups of pupils. The inspector scrutinised a variety of documents in relation to behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' outcomes and staff performance. The inspector also evaluated: improvement plans; policies for safeguarding; the single central record (showing the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils); the school's self-evaluation; and the review of pupil premium. The inspector assessed the impact of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection. This concentrated on the areas for improvement to leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Context

Bower Park Academy joined the Empower Learning Academy Trust (ELAT) in September 2016. The sponsor is Hall Mead School, an outstanding school in Uppminster.

The school has been through a period of turbulence with four different headteachers since April 2016. An acting headteacher was leading the school at the time of the previous inspection. The substantive headteacher was absent through ill health and retired at the end of 2016. The current principal was seconded from the trust to Bower Park Academy in January 2017 on an acting basis and has now been confirmed as permanent.

Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to staffing. Two new assistant principals have been appointed including a member of staff who had been temporarily seconded to the school to support improvements in teaching and learning. The senior leadership team has been extended to create additional capacity for leadership.

As well as changes to senior leadership, 20 members of staff will leave the school at the end of August. An executive head of mathematics from Hall Mead School and a head of science have been appointed, as well as new teachers in these subjects.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since his recent appointment, the principal has created a clear vision for the school's improvement and has made a strong start to making this a reality. The senior leadership team has been restructured with well-defined duties and responsibilities. Lines of accountability are now clear and middle leaders know to whom they report. This reorganisation has required some difficult decisions by the principal. This has been carried out sensitively but with a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. As a result, the school now has a more streamlined and effective leadership team which has started to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

The post-inspection action plan sets out a thorough programme for improvement. It identifies the areas for improvement accurately and includes measurable outcomes. This means that governors can hold leaders to account for their work to improve the achievement of pupils. While the plan is long, each priority is cross referenced, recognising that there is a dependency between the areas for improvement. For example, actions to raise pupils' achievements are properly linked to improving the quality of teaching and reducing absence rates.

Leaders have thoroughly revised the procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching. They now make judgements about quality based on a range of information over time. This information includes observations of learning in classrooms, short walks through lessons, looking at pupils' books and analysing assessment information. This is giving leaders a more rounded picture of the overall quality of teaching than the methods used previously. As a result, judgements are increasingly fair and accurate, and based firmly on the long-term effect of teaching on pupils' achievements.

Senior leaders have introduced a robust system to check pupils' progress and identify those that are not doing as well as they should. Regular assessment information is analysed thoroughly to provide a range of information about the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This information is becoming increasingly sophisticated so that leaders routinely 'drill down' and identify which pupils are falling behind and why.

The process to check teachers' performance is linked closely to the way senior leaders check pupils' progress and the quality of teaching over time. This means that teachers' performance is evaluated using a wide variety of information and does not rely solely on one lesson. This enables senior leaders to give teachers individual support and guidance, and direct, reliable and effective support to where it is most needed. It also ensures that pay progression is linked clearly to performance.

A strength of these new systems and procedures is that they complement each

other effectively and provide a joined-up approach to improvement. For example, professional development is used effectively to meet the school's improvement targets. Another strength is the focus on the quality of teaching and learning. This is a common thread that runs through the school's plans for improvement and the new procedures for checking the quality of its work.

Within a month of receiving the previous inspection report, governors commissioned a review of pupil premium expenditure. This has informed work to overhaul the way the money is used to support disadvantaged pupils and target support more closely to need. This work is ongoing but the impact is starting to show; the differences between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and those of others are beginning to shrink. However, leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils, especially the most able, reach their potential.

Significant weaknesses in the leadership of mathematics and science are being tackled decisively. Senior leaders, with the strong support of governors and the trust, have introduced a range of actions. These include rewriting the schemes of work for both subjects, supporting teachers to improve their practice and providing courses more in tune with pupils' previous learning. Plans and actions sensibly take account of the inconsistencies in pupils' learning that have resulted from poor teaching in the past. In addition, a thorough revamp of teaching in both subjects is under way with the help of other schools in the trust. For example, the heads of mathematics and science at Hall Mead Academy have worked closely with Bower Park staff to improve the curriculum and teaching. While there remains much to be done, this work is starting to have a positive impact. In science, the school's assessment information shows that the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades at GCSE is set to double. Improvement in mathematics is less striking but there are clear signs that things are getting better. Pupils in Years 9 and 10 said that work was more challenging and that they are 'definitely learning better'.

The interim transition board, set up in September 2016 to replace the previous governing body, has been used effectively to improve governance. With the strong support of the trust's governing body, the interim board has helped to inject a clear sense of urgency and ambition. This is being translated into improved oversight of the school's improvement work. Governors hold the school to account well, balancing this with strong support. For example, the trust and the interim board have ensured that teachers from other schools in the trust are available to support Bower Park. This support is having a positive impact and although there is still some way to go, improvements to teaching, the curriculum and pupils' outcomes are clear.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have established a robust system for assessing pupils' performance. As a result, the analysis of data is much sharper and means that teachers have up-to-date information about pupils' achievements, including their starting points. In addition, teachers are using this information to develop the curriculum, especially in mathematics and science. For example, the revised schemes of work are helping to ensure that work is appropriately challenging and prepares pupils properly for their GCSE examinations. However, as the school recognises, there is still more to do to ensure that the most able pupils achieve their potential.

The revised assessment procedures are having a clear and positive impact on outcomes. Leaders have revised the way targets are set so that they are more challenging. This is helping to ensure that teachers' expectations are suitably high. Leaders have also introduced a common approach to giving pupils written feedback. This is understood by both staff and pupils and increasingly is being used consistently across subjects. Pupils are clear that it helps them improve their work.

Pupils' work is generally well presented now and there is evidence of an increasing focus by teachers on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

The recruitment and retention of teachers have been a challenge and resulted in poor teaching and falling standards. However, with the help of the trust, senior leaders have been able to reduce the school's reliance on temporary teachers. While some temporary teachers remain, leaders have given them effective support. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is more consistent than in the past.

There are some strong teachers, with excellent knowledge and a passion for their subjects. However, staff changes in the past have had a negative impact on pupils' progress and have left gaps in their learning. Senior leaders are doing what they can to address this situation with some noticeable successes. For example, teachers work together to plan what they will teach and the most skilled teachers are working with others who need support. As a result, the quality of teaching over time is improving, albeit with much still to do.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are mainly positive. Pupils are nearly always willing to learn and follow instructions. However, teachers do not use these positive attitudes consistently to set challenging work that deepens pupils' skills. As a result, some pupils are not stretched sufficiently. However, this is beginning to change and lessons are now much more likely to be interesting, engaging and challenging, enabling pupils to make clear progress and extend their skills and understanding to a deeper level. For example, in mathematics, pupils are now being given work that enables them to understand how to use what they have learned to solve problems. Strong questioning in humanities extended pupils' thinking well, while in physical education, well-structured work challenged pupils to take their physical skills to the next level.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Senior leaders have rightly identified monitoring behaviour and attendance as priorities in the post-inspection action plan. As a result, the school now has thorough information about overall attendance, persistent absence and the use of sanctions such as internal isolation and fixed-term exclusions. This information is used well to identify patterns for different groups of pupils and trends over time. In addition, leaders use the information to check progress in meeting the action plan's targets. This information shows that there has been a reduction in the use of the 'on-call' system, internal isolation and fixed-term exclusions. However, this is variable across the year groups. Some of the largest improvements are in Years 8 and 10, especially in relation to decreasing the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Despite some improvement in overall attendance, it remains below the national average. However, the detailed monitoring of patterns is helping leaders to pinpoint more accurately where the main weaknesses lie. As a result, leaders have put in place a wide range of strategies to boost pupils' attendance. Overall, the work to improve attendance is having a positive impact and while persistent absence remains a challenge for the school, it is improving. This is confirmed by pupils who say that receiving badges has improved attendance. Nevertheless, senior leaders recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that attendance is at least in line with the national average.

Pupils behave well in classrooms and around the school. Almost universally, they have positive attitudes to learning and conduct themselves well. They are keen to learn and have increasingly high aspirations. Relationships between teachers and pupils are firm but friendly. Pupils say that the 'strike card' has made a significant difference to behaviour in classrooms. Teachers are 'cracking down' on behaviour so that the learning of others is not disrupted. Pupils report that bullying 'rarely happens'. However, they said that if there is any bullying, it is dealt with straight away by teachers.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They mentioned, particularly, that teachers are at the gate at the start and end of school, and at the pelican crossing. Younger pupils described the 'hub' where staff, including a counsellor, provide support if they have a problem. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and healthy through workshops on road safety, alcohol abuse, knife crime and mental health. They are also given information about the safe use of the internet, including cyber-bullying.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress has been negatively affected by consistently poor teaching in recent

years. In 2016, pupils' progress was significantly below average and in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally for all pupils, and for disadvantaged pupils. Following the last inspection, the new principal took swift action to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Pupils are still affected by previous poor teaching but they are now starting to catch up. Extensive work has been carried out to support pupils currently in Year 11 in the lead-up to their examinations. Leaders evaluate that the progress of current pupils has improved. They expect the 2017 GCSE examination results to be better than those in 2016 although recognise that they will still not be as strong as they should be.

The school's assessment information indicates that pupils who are currently in Years 7 to 10 are making better progress than in the past. However, the legacy of underachievement means that some gaps in their knowledge and understanding remain, especially in Year 10. Leaders acknowledge that there is still much to do to accelerate progress further. For example, although the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving, the most able pupils are not doing as well as they should. Nevertheless, the school has made a robust start and the strategies for improvement are having a positive impact. In science and mathematics, where achievement was especially low, higher expectations and a more appropriate curriculum are improving pupils' progress.

External support

The current sponsor, ELAT, has appointed the principal, who has taken effective action to bring about improvements since the last inspection. In addition, several leaders have been seconded to the school from other positions in the trust. This includes the trust's teaching and learning lead and the heads of mathematics and science from Hall Mead School. The support provided by these leaders has been especially beneficial and, as a result, the school is now in a much better position to improve.

Additional support has also been provided by a range of external consultants. This has enabled the school to check that its judgements about the quality of teaching, and the progress of pupils, are accurate and reliable. Links with the other schools in the trust have also been effective in supporting the revision of the curriculum and in improving teachers' skills and expertise.