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3 November 2017

Dr Jo Trevenna
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Dear Dr Trevenna

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Herbert Leon Academy

Following my visit with Nicholas Simmons, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 17–18 October 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 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 2016. 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.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - securing effective leadership at all levels across the school
 - ensuring that all leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this to promote improvements with sufficient urgency
 - ensuring that there is a clear and consistently shared view about what effective teaching looks like across the curriculum
 - ensuring that leaders track robustly and review the work they do to check that their actions have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes
 - rapidly improve the reliability of assessment information, so that leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils across the school and in different year groups.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that an effective behaviour policy is consistently applied across the school, so that low-level disruption is eradicated
 - providing teachers with effective support in managing behaviour
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour
 - ensuring that staff actively, consistently and effectively promote equality, tolerance and respect
 - improving the attendance of all pupils, including significantly reducing the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, who are frequently absent.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - plan challenging lessons that enable all pupils to make good progress from their particular starting points, especially the most able
 - use assessment information carefully to target teaching activities and interventions more sharply to reduce gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that the recent rapid improvements to the sixth form are sustained, so that all students make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for their next steps.

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.

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 second monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 October 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school at work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior leaders and middle leaders, staff and groups of pupils. A meeting was also held by telephone with the chair and two other members of the local governing body. This inspection had a specific focus on English, mathematics, science and humanities. Inspectors observed teaching in these subjects. Most observations were carried out jointly with a senior leader. In addition, inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the assistant principal responsible for assessment and mathematics has left. A vice principal has taken on these responsibilities. The head of humanities left at the end of the summer term. The head of mathematics will be leaving at the end of this term. Internal interviews for his replacement are taking place this week. Six teaching staff left in the summer. Four teachers joined the school at the start of this term. There are 54 fewer pupils on the school role than at this time last year.

The management board has been reconstituted as a local governing body. A new chair is in place who is the national director for challenge and intervention for the academy trust. The head of an outstanding secondary school in the trust now sits on the governing body.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have built successfully on some of the approaches set up last term. Leaders have continued to improve their analysis and reporting of performance information. An easy-to-read, one-page report for each year group provides a much clearer picture than previously of pupils' achievement by group and subject. Leaders rightly recognise that further work is needed to ensure that assessment information in a few subjects, such as science, is accurate enough to be useful. Suitable assessment approaches are now in place to aid leaders' understanding of the starting points and impact of the support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders' use of information about pupils' behaviour is increasingly effective.

Senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching provide some useful information. Teachers identified by leaders as needing to improve the most received an intensive support programme during the summer term. Most teachers on the programme have since left. Those who stayed have improved their practice. These changes have contributed to improvements in teaching. Teachers continue to receive, and value, weekly sessions where they learn about good practice in the school.

However, the training and support provided is not consistently leading to improvements in the subjects where teaching is weakest. Additionally, subject leaders are typically not playing a full part in checking teaching quality and supporting teachers to improve. These leaders have had limited training and development opportunities to strengthen their leadership skills. Leaders and governors recognise the need to adjust and strengthen their approach to quicken the pace of improvement. Leaders' access to an increased range of external support is providing them with more capacity to do this.

The new local governing body has brought fresh insight and a renewed sense of urgency. Governors are tightening their expectations of leaders. The new governors have quickly formed an accurate view of the school's weaknesses and pinpointed key priorities for improvement. Governors' increased ties with the central trust team and outstanding school leaders are helping them make sure suitable support is in place for the next part of the journey.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching in the core subjects and humanities is improving. Teachers' expectations for what pupils should learn are much more suitable than was previously the case. Typically, teachers now set work appropriate to the age of the pupils they teach. In mathematics, leaders' introduction of a 'mastery' approach is starting to provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. In science, pupils have more opportunities to develop their science skills, preparing them better for GCSE. Experiments are now a routine part of science teaching.

Teachers' use of assessment in the core subjects remains a weakness. The school's approach of using 'cold' and 'hot' tasks has had limited impact. Teachers typically do not have enough understanding of pupils' prior knowledge of the topic being taught or the extent to which pupils are grasping the learning. Lesson activities often do not build effectively on what pupils already know and can do. Teachers have, in the main, responded well to leaders' expectation that each lesson includes an 'extension' task, aimed at stretching the most able pupils. However, these tasks often do not link closely enough to the main lesson content and the point pupils are at in their learning to be of much use.

Other aspects of teaching also need further attention. Some teachers spend much of lesson time addressing the whole class without ensuring this is helping pupils learn. Pupils are often not given enough time to grasp one concept before the teacher introduces another one. Teachers' explanations and use of questioning to check and deepen pupils' understanding are often not effective. As a result, on such occasions, pupils learn little.

Teachers now have a clear understanding of which pupils in their class are

disadvantaged and those who have special needs and/or disabilities. The school's 'SEND passports' provide teachers with helpful information and useful strategies for supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this is not leading to consistent improvements in teaching. Teachers in the subjects focused on during the inspection are not making sufficient use of the information provided.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour in lessons is continuing to improve. In most lessons visited during the inspection, pupils arrived punctually and behaved well. Pupils understood and followed routines and expectations. Incidents of behaviour requiring teachers to call for support from a senior leader are reducing in frequency. However, pockets of poor behaviour remain. Where teaching is weakest, some pupils cause disruption and little learning takes place. Teachers are applying the behaviour code more consistently than previously. However, some pupils have not changed their behaviour as a result.

Leaders have taken an increasingly firm stance against poor behaviour over the last few months. One initial consequence of this was that the total number of days pupils were excluded increased in the summer term. Encouragingly, this firmer stance is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. The number of pupils receiving one or more exclusions reduced during the last year. This term, the number of days pupils have been excluded is less than half that seen by the same point last year.

'The Zone' is providing effective behavioural and/or emotional support for those disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who need such support. Most pupils attending 'The Zone' have improved their attendance and behaviour.

Leaders have continued to make a concerted effort to promote pupils' understanding of the importance of treating all with equal respect and avoiding discriminatory language. Despite this, pupils reported that the use of prejudicial language as 'banter' or to be unpleasant was still commonplace. Encouragingly, pupils who spoke to inspectors knew why using this language, even as a joke, was not acceptable, and did not condone this behaviour. Nevertheless, pupils were clear that some pupils continue to ignore the school's message. Some pupils felt that staff are not consistently alert enough to this behaviour and leave it unchallenged.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science (the core subjects) remains too variable. On average, pupils' achievement in these subjects by the end of key stage 4 was much lower than the national average in 2017. Where teaching has strengthened, current pupils are typically making better progress than was

previously the case, but there is not yet a consistent picture of improvement across classes. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are receiving better support than previously outside of lessons. This is aiding their wider development. However, because teaching in the core subjects is not meeting the needs of these pupils well enough, they still often make weak progress.

Pupils are typically making better progress than was previously the case in geography and history. Increased achievement at the end of key stage 4 in history in 2017 was an early indication of the impact of improving teaching in these subjects.

Typically, pupils have continued to make reasonable or better progress in other subjects. Improvements in teaching over the last year contributed to better outcomes at the end of key stage 4. Provisional information shows that, in 2017, pupils' progress across their best eight subjects (the school's 'progress 8' score) was in line with the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' achievement by the end of key stage 4 also improved significantly. Pupils' achievement in subjects such as drama, design and technology, and in catering (the 'open' element), was high.

External support

Until now, leaders have made quite limited use of external support. This term, leaders have secured a wider range of support. This includes support from the headteacher of Maltings School, an outstanding secondary school. Leaders are also making more use of the existing link with Charles Warren Primary School. A group of leaders and teachers are visiting Charles Warren shortly to aid their understanding of the quality of teaching and levels of challenge pupils arriving in Year 7 have typically experienced in primary school. Mathematics and English advisers from the trust are now working with leaders and teachers in the mathematics and English departments. It is too soon to see the impact of this increased support. Leaders and governors recognise that this support must quickly bear fruit if the school is to continue to improve as quickly as it needs to.