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Mr James Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The E-Act Burnham Park Academy

Following my visit with Suzanne Richards, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 to 6 December 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 July 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.

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 board of trustees, the regional education director for E-Act multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

Increase the effectiveness of leadership across the school by:

- evaluating the impact of current actions and refining them so that they focus on what will make the most rapid improvements to the school
- ensuring that leaders' areas of responsibility are clear, so that they can be held increasingly to account.

Embed and develop recent actions to improve behaviour and attendance, so that more pupils attend school regularly and exclusions are reduced.

Improve the consistency of high-quality teaching across the school, so that it leads to improved outcomes for all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, by:

- ensuring that teachers' expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour are consistently high across the school
- making sure that teachers use information about prior learning to plan work that more closely meets pupils' individual starting points.

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.

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 December 2017 to 6 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors made visits to observe learning across the school. On most occasions, they were accompanied by a senior member of staff. Inspectors also undertook short, unaccompanied visits to classes to check pupils' behaviour. Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to: safeguarding, the checks made before staff are employed, improvement planning, pupils' progress and the school's evaluation of its progress to date. Inspectors also met separately with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, a group of staff, a group of parents, two groups of pupils, the regional education director for the trust, one of the trust's national advisers (who was previously the executive headteacher of this school) and members of the raising achievement board (the 'RAB', made up of trust system leaders who have been working with the school).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been changes to the way the trust oversees the school. There is no longer an executive headteacher with oversight of the school, instead the headteacher is held to account by the trust's regional director and the RAB (made up of system leaders from the trust who work closely with the school on a regular basis).

A new assistant headteacher has joined the school, with responsibility for developing middle leaders and improving provision for disadvantaged pupils.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Ably led by the highly dedicated headteacher, senior leaders have shown unwavering determination to improve the school. Their carefully considered actions are ensuring that the school continues on its upward journey. The school's positive ethos, which is both nurturing and aspirational, is now well established. As a consequence, pupils' behaviour has improved still further. One pupil described the open and considerate school culture as 'like being in a big family'. Parents also praised the upbeat atmosphere in the school. However, leaders acknowledge that pupils' attendance has not improved as successfully as pupils' behaviour, despite their best efforts.

The leadership of the school is now on a surer footing. Senior leaders are continuing to benefit from the expertise and challenge provided by trust system leaders. For instance, a system leader worked successfully alongside leaders in the school to develop a method for tracking pupils' progress towards meeting their challenging targets. However, improvements are now increasingly 'home-grown' and less dependent on support from the trust. The headteacher has made a number of

effective changes to the senior leadership team to strengthen its capacity. Senior leaders work well together, effectively coordinating improvements across the school. The newly appointed assistant headteacher has worked successfully with middle leaders. They are now much clearer about their roles and what is required of them to do their jobs well. Senior leaders are making better use of information they have about pupils' progress when they meet with the middle leaders they manage. They often use this information to ask challenging questions. For example, they ask why some pupils are not catching up as quickly as others and what middle leaders are doing to support less confident staff.

Leaders' sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching is paying off. Across the school, pupils' progress is generally improving due to better teaching. However, senior leaders have accurately identified that in science and humanities, improvements in pupils' progress and attainment are not as strong as in other subject areas. Well-led changes to the curriculum continue to benefit pupils identified for 'aspire' and 'enterprise' learning pathways. A major reason for this is because pupils in 'aspire' and 'enterprise' groups are provided with a highly structured learning environment. However, leaders acknowledge there is not enough precision in the way additional support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is targeted.

Governance arrangements are more exacting and lines of accountability are clearer. The headteacher is held to account vigorously by E-Act's regional director, who does not have a role within the school itself but has an incisive overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He works well with members of the RAB to identify actions that are not working as well as anticipated. He wisely picks up on these in one-to-one meetings with the headteacher, checking that the headteacher has the resources he needs to make improvements. In recognition of difficulties in recruiting staff, the regional director is working closely with the trust to find solutions to shortages of some specialist teachers, although this continues to be a significant challenge for the school.

Recommendations from the review of pupil premium funding undertaken in January 2017 have not been fully implemented. The recently appointed senior leader with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils has made a good start on implementing a number of other improvements. In particular, there has been consolidated effort to gather detailed information about disadvantaged pupils' home lives and attitudes. The school acknowledges that this work is embryonic, and has a sensible timeline in place which shows how the responsible leader will put this information to good use in the future.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

By working in close collaboration with system leaders, senior leaders have introduced a number of carefully considered new approaches to teaching. Pupils recognise that teaching is better than before, citing fewer worksheets and teachers

who care more about helping them to learn than hitherto. In addition, pupils are better engaged at the start of lessons by the activities teachers set to stimulate their curiosity. Even in subjects where teaching is generally weaker, teachers implement most agreed approaches in a consistent manner. For example, the new approach to helping pupils improve their work is being used well across the school.

Pupils told inspectors that they like the fact that more is required of them and endeavour to meet the raised standards. For example, in construction, pupils are expected to use technical equipment to support them in building a straight wall from scratch. Higher expectations of what pupils can achieve are also evident in some English classes. In one English class, pupils were confidently able to explore motivations for a character's actions. In order to do this they sensibly discussed their ideas with their classmates, applying their understanding of how people lived and thought in the era in which their book was set. Teachers mostly now have higher expectations of how hard pupils should work and the standard of their presentation. However, when planning future learning, teachers do not always use the checks they make on pupils' learning and understanding during lessons. Sometimes pupils, including the most able, are not given enough guidance on how to write academically using the style and language required to achieve success in their GCSEs. As a consequence, although most-able pupils generally make strong progress, they do not always make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

In some classes, teachers use their subject knowledge well. However, a small number of teachers are not specialists in the subject they teach and their knowledge is not as secure. As a result, sometimes pupils' misconceptions are not tackled well enough. Subject leaders are playing an increasing role in developing teachers' subject expertise. For instance, the science subject leader is working closely to support some members of her team in developing their subject knowledge and how they transmit it to pupils. She has made a number of improvements but they are not yet bedded in across the department.

Teaching in the 'enterprise' group is stronger than in 'aspire'. This is because in 'enterprise', there is a clearer approach to assessing how well pupils develop their knowledge and skills through the projects they undertake. The work set provides pupils with well-planned opportunities to apply learning in real-life situations, such as publicising and costing charity events. In 'aspire', pupils are nurtured well and gain from this approach. However, the way their learning is assessed does not always meet their needs well enough. In addition, some pupils would benefit from more specialised additional help. Leaders have already identified these issues and have started to make changes to strengthen the provision. It is too early to comment on their impact.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour has continued to improve, and fixed-term exclusions have steadily declined. This is because on a day-to-day basis teachers diligently implement

agreed approaches to managing pupils' behaviour. They are supported in their endeavours by the highly visible senior team. Inspectors noted that during their visit, pupils' behaviour around school was calm and orderly. Pupils show respect for each other and their teachers. They take pride in their school. The successful use of sanctions and rewards means there has also been a decline in the use of internal exclusions in all year groups except Year 10. Leaders' thorough checks have indicated that Year 10 behaviour is not as strong as that of pupils in other year groups. Leaders have acted swiftly in tackling this and have introduced a very firm approach to breaches of behaviour in Year 10. Although the approach has increased the number of internal exclusions in the short term, leaders are hopeful it will reduce them in the long term. Leaders' rapid and vigorous response to the issues in Year 10 is indicative of how firmly they act on the checks they make on pupils' behaviour.

Improvements in attendance have not been as clear-cut as those in behaviour. Attendance to date has slightly declined since the same period last academic year. This is because of some pupils' persistent absence. Leaders have worked very hard to tackle this, including by funding taxis to support pupils in making the journey to and from school. Despite these efforts, attendance figures are dented by the low attendance of a small group of pupils, many of whom have SEN and/or disabilities. The school has had success in improving the percentage of pupils whose attendance is 95% and above.

The school's work to support pupils with challenging behaviour who are very disengaged from learning has gone from strength to strength. The 'enterprise' curriculum meets the needs of this group of pupils well. Refinements have been made to the ways the responsible leader measures the impact of the 'enterprise' curriculum. Now information on the behaviour and attendance of pupils in the 'enterprise' group is carefully scrutinised to evaluate the impact of the curriculum. This information shows that the 'enterprise' curriculum is having a very positive impact on pupils' behaviour and attendance over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Improved teaching has led to better outcomes, as shown by more positive 2017 GCSE results. Early last academic year, leaders astutely recognised that a legacy of weaker teaching meant that Year 11 had a long way to go in order to succeed in their GCSE examinations. The best teachers were promptly assigned to GCSE groups and a raft of additional help was provided to boost targeted pupils' progress. Better teaching and additional support paid dividends. Pupils' progress and attainment scores in 2017 were broadly average, despite English and mathematics examinations being much more challenging. In addition, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes improved so that the difference between their outcomes and those of others narrowed. Despite improvements overall, in some English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, pupils' achievement remained too low, notably in science, history and geography. In addition, very few pupils took a GCSE in a modern foreign

language, which also had a negative effect on EBacc results.

The new system that tracks pupils' progress towards challenging end-of-year and end-of-key stage 4 targets is now fully operational and working well. Pupils in Years 7 and 8, including disadvantaged pupils, are generally on track to meet both sets of challenging targets. However, a number of pupils, particularly those in Year 9, have gaps in their learning due to a legacy of weak teaching. These gaps are not always being filled fast enough. Leaders' tight monitoring has enabled them to identify that some pupils are in danger of not fulfilling their potential. To tackle this, leaders are ensuring that targeted pupils are provided with well-planned extra help. In addition, some pupils, including most-able pupils with potential, are held back because they cannot express their ideas well enough in writing. The school's work to develop this aspect of literacy is not well enough developed.

In general, across the school, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those in the 'aspire' group, do not make as strong progress as other pupils. Progress scores in 2017 GCSE examinations showed that this group's progress did not increase as much as the progress made by other groups. This group's progress is negatively affected by the poor attendance of some pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Senior leaders and system leaders have already identified the progress of pupils with additional needs as an area for further development. They are astutely making changes in order to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

External support

External support is carefully targeted by the headteacher and regional education director and is accessed mainly from partner schools in the E-Act trust, including some primary schools. Primary schools have supported leaders well in developing an approach to assessing pupils' progress in the 'enterprise' curriculum. System leaders who work across the trust have also provided the school with effective targeted support. For example, the system leader for inclusion has worked well with the SEN coordinator (SENCo) to clear some of the backlog of administrative work. As a consequence, the SENCo now has greater clarity about how best to improve provision. Of note is the way the director has used headteachers from outstanding schools outside the trust to review the school. Their sharp eyes and high standards have supported the school in moving forward. Leaders have embraced the challenge which these reviews bring, responding positively to external advice and guidance.