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Mr Stuart McLaughlin
Principal
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Dear Mr McLaughlin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bower Park Academy

Following my visit with Carolyn Dickinson, Her Majesty's Inspector, Sarah Parker, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Martin O'Sullivan, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18–19 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 December 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.

The school's post-Ofsted 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 board of trustees and the chief executive

officer of the multi-academy trust, 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 pupil progress is monitored, particularly at key stage 3, 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 second monitoring inspection on 18–19 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders and groups of pupils. They also held meetings with the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. Inspectors visited 32 lessons, jointly with leaders, across different subjects and all year groups, except pupils in Year 10, who were on work experience. During visits to classrooms, inspectors spoke to pupils and looked at their books to evaluate the quality of learning. Inspectors also scrutinised a sample of pupils' books from English, science and modern foreign languages. Inspectors looked at a variety of documents, including information relating to attendance, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' outcomes and staff performance. Inspectors evaluated improvement plans, arrangements for safeguarding and the school's self-evaluation. They 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, currently an outstanding school in Upminster.

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been significant changes to staffing. The senior leadership now includes a new deputy principal and four assistant principals.

Twenty members of staff left the school at the end of August and 10 new teachers have been appointed to mainly the science and mathematics departments. Nearly all teachers in these departments are new to the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The improvements identified in the previous monitoring inspection are being consolidated effectively. As a result, the effectiveness of leadership and management continues to improve.

The school's post-Ofsted action plan is focused clearly on improving pupils' outcomes. It is linked closely to the areas for improvement identified at the December 2016 inspection. The plan identifies eight specific priorities related to each of these areas, plus detailed measurable outcomes. For example, the criteria for measuring 'effective leadership' include progress and attainment outcomes for

disadvantaged pupils and the most able. As a result, governors have the necessary information to hold leaders to account for their impact on pupils' achievement effectively.

The post-Ofsted action plan sets out clearly the school's procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching. These consolidate and strengthen the proposals to base judgements about the quality of teaching on a range of information over time. Leaders at all levels speak knowledgeably about the 'quality of teaching over time' (QTOT) process and their role in bringing about improvements. The plan identifies clear targets for these improvements. For example, one target identifies that 85% of the teaching will be good by April 2018 and 100% good by July 2018. Evidence from this monitoring inspection indicates that while inconsistencies remain, the teaching quality is improving.

The procedures to check pupils' progress and identify those who may be falling behind are being consolidated successfully. The analysis of assessment information, collected at fixed points during the year, is used effectively to give leaders and governors reliable evidence of pupils' progress over time. This ensures that they are able to pinpoint accurately where and when to provide effective support to prevent pupils from falling behind. This is starting to have a positive impact on raising achievement. However, leaders also recognise that the school is on a journey and has not yet achieved its goals fully.

The revised procedures for checking teachers' performance are now well established. These are linked closely to pupils' progress over time and the post-Ofsted action plan. As a result, the procedures are proving to be effective tools for improving teaching quality and raising pupils' achievements. The appraisal system contributes well to staff morale, which is noticeably better than at the previous monitoring inspection.

Pupil premium expenditure is effectively evaluated as part of leaders' comprehensive approach to assessing the overall performance of the school. The previous monitoring inspection found that the school was successfully diminishing the differences between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. However, it noted that more needed to be done to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils, and the most able pupils, reach their potential. While there has been progress in reducing these differences further, leaders recognise that additional work is required. As a result, they have rightly maintained a strong focus on raising the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

Strong progress is being made in dealing with the significant weaknesses in the leadership of mathematics and science. Nearly all the teaching staff in both subjects are newly appointed. In mathematics, a shared approach to leading the department is proving particularly successful. Teaching quality and pupils' achievements in mathematics continue to improve well. However, improvements in science are slower and while the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes is noticeable,

achievement is not yet solidly good.

Continued improvements to governance mean that a local governing body now replaces the interim transition board. The appointment of new governors supports the work of the local governing body effectively. Governors are persistent in their work to hold the school to account and providing support to leaders. For example, governors work closely with leaders to ensure that the information they receive about the school's performance is thorough. This enables governors to provide both detailed scrutiny and encouragement. This has a positive impact on leadership, teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Leaders and governors have been particularly successful in recruiting new teachers. These new appointments bring with them high levels of expertise from good and outstanding schools in other areas of London. This has helped to inject a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm into teaching and is resulting in improved outcomes, especially in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, in science.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching continues to improve. The strong procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching, introduced last academic year, are becoming increasingly effective. This is the result of a range of improvements, including an even sharper analysis of assessment information and a clear focus on high expectations and challenge for all pupils. This broad range of evidence is used well to evaluate the quality of teaching over time and ensures that leaders' judgements are accurate. It also enables leaders to give teachers well-targeted support where required.

Leaders are continuing to focus on ensuring that teachers use the assessment information effectively to give pupils helpful guidance about how to improve their work. While this is having a positive impact on teaching quality and pupils' achievement, there remain variations across and within subjects.

As at the previous monitoring inspection, there are some effective teachers, with excellent knowledge and a passion for their subjects. This is particularly so in mathematics, but it is also evident in other subjects, including English, science and modern foreign languages. Similarly, there is some effective use of questions that challenge all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, to deepen their knowledge and understanding. However, these characteristics are not yet used consistently across the school and while the quality of teaching over time is improving, variations remain. As a result, teaching is not yet consistently good.

Learning in classrooms is now more likely to be interesting and engaging. This means that pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and that they are increasingly keen to do well and make progress with their work. For example, Year 11 pupils were engaged in using the results of their recent 'mock' GCSE examinations to identify where they needed to improve.

While the level of challenge has improved, and achievement is rising, there remain some pupils who are not sufficiently challenged to achieve their best. This is particularly so for disadvantaged pupils and the most able, although there have been some clear improvements. For example, work in mathematics, modern foreign languages and English is often interesting and challenging. However, this is not always the case and some teaching fails to capture pupils' interest to keep them engaged fully in their work. As a result, pupils' progress is sometimes not as strong as it should be.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour and attendance are improving. This is the result of the enhanced quality of information the school collects and the robust procedures for dealing with pupils' absence. It is also because leaders have maintained the focus on monitoring behaviour and attendance in the post-Ofsted action plan. For example, the plan identifies clear targets for improving the attendance and reducing persistent absence of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. These targets are appropriately challenging but also realistic. As a result, overall attendance is now close to the national average.

As at the previous monitoring inspection, persistent absence remains a challenge for the school. However, it continues to improve. While persistent absence remains high compared with the national average, especially for disadvantaged pupils, it has been halved over the past year.

Pupils mostly behave well in classrooms and around the school. Pupils' conduct continues to be strong and relationships between teachers and pupils are positive. Pupils say that bullying is rare but are confident it would be dealt with effectively were it to happen. They are clear that they feel safe in school and that they do not experience gender or racial name-calling.

The quality of pastoral care continues to be strong and has been enhanced effectively since the full inspection in 2016. For example, the revamped house system means that pupils have a dedicated 'support and guidance manager' to whom they can turn if they have a problem. These managers also monitor pupils' personal and academic development, thus enabling them to provide relevant and well-directed support.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress and achievements are improving. The provisional 2017 GCSE results show that progress is now average, a significant improvement on the 2016 figures. This is because of continued progress in raising the quality of teaching and the clarity of leaders' vision and actions.

The school's assessment information shows that pupils currently in the school are also making better progress. Standards in mathematics and English have noticeably improved. Although the assessment information is based on just one term's work, it indicates that pupils in all years are on track to achieve their targets. Nevertheless, some weaknesses still remain. While the achievements of the most able pupils are improved, there is still more to do to ensure that all reach their potential. This is partly the result of the legacy of ineffective teaching that means that there are still some gaps in pupils' learning, especially in Year 11. However, these gaps are decreasing as a result of better teaching and increasingly challenging work.

The disparities between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, and others nationally are reducing. However, leaders recognise that this remains a priority for the school and are continuing to focus strongly on raising outcomes for this group. For example, robust priorities and targets for disadvantaged pupils, and the most able pupils, are threaded throughout the post-Ofsted action plan. As a result, there is an urgency to improving outcomes that is shared with, and understood by, leaders at all levels, including governors.

External support

The school's sponsor, ELAT, continues to provide effective support. The mathematics department receives very effective support from the head of mathematics at Hall Mead School for one day each week. Staff at Bower Park say that this is very helpful and value the opportunity for support and discussion about improvements. Other help includes support from schools in the trust to moderate and standardise teachers' assessments. This is proving beneficial in ensuring that assessment is accurate and in raising teachers' expectations.