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Mr Clive Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wednesfield High Specialist Engineering Academy

Following my visit with Bianke Zemke, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Graham Tyrer, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 14–15 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 January 2017. 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 may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer (CEO) of Education Central Multi-Academy Trust (ECMAT), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2017.

- Take urgent and effective action to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form are effective by:
 - ensuring that all the necessary checks on staff and relevant adults, including identity checks, are completed and recorded on the single central record
 - making certain that leaders in the school monitor these systems closely and are confident of their robustness
 - clarifying the extent to which staff appointments have followed safer recruitment procedures fully, making proper checks where procedures have not been followed
 - making sure that the use of unlawful exclusions ceases immediately
 - ensuring that pupils' attendance is recorded accurately and is carefully monitored
 - addressing the boisterous, disorderly and occasionally dangerous behaviour around the school site so that it is stopped
 - making robust checks on the personal development, behaviour, welfare, attendance and progress of pupils who are in alternative provision.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the multi-academy trust and governing body respond to the long-standing weaknesses in leadership and teaching in the school, with swift and effective support
 - extra funding provided for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who enter the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills is effectively used
 - leaders develop their ability to accurately evaluate the impact of the many carefully considered changes recently made to leadership structures on teaching, learning and assessment
 - teachers follow the school's marking and feedback policy closely
 - leaders reduce the use of non-specialist and short-term staff, and recruit and retain high-quality teachers in all subject areas.
- Improve attendance in the sixth form and in Years 7 to 11 of all pupils, but particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, by:
 - carefully evaluating the impact of the current strategies used to improve the attendance of these groups to determine which are most effective
 - using national comparisons for attendance when making decisions about

whether attendance for groups is a cause for concern.

- Improve pupils' behaviour so that all pupils feel safe in school and poor behaviour does not disrupt lessons by:
 - developing consistency in teachers' approach to managing pupils' behaviour and providing effective support to teachers when behaviour problems occur
 - reducing bullying and pupils' fear that they will be bullied
 - reducing the number of pupils missing their lessons when they are in the on-site unit for short-term and long-term internal exclusions.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that outcomes accelerate for all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information to match tasks to the ability level and knowledge of their pupils, making sure that work is not too easy or too hard.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how these aspects of leadership and management might be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14–15 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. They met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, other staff and three groups of pupils. The lead inspector met with a member of the interim advisory board (IAB) and spoke with another over the telephone. A telephone conversation was held with the CEO of ECMAT, the school's sponsor.

Inspectors observed learning and behaviour during visits to lessons. Some of these visits were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed pupils at morning break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school. They spoke with many pupils about their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. Several documents were scrutinised including the school's improvement plan, self-evaluation, minutes of an IAB meeting, and the school's records about current pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance.

Context

The school's local governing body was replaced by an IAB in September 2017. The IAB has met once, in October. A second scheduled meeting was recently cancelled due to adverse weather. Restructuring of senior and middle leadership has been completed. Senior leaders have revised roles and responsibilities. Subject departments have been reorganised into four faculties, each with a new head of faculty. Each faculty has a 'teaching and learning leader' in addition to the head of faculty. The school's pastoral structures have been revised. Three 'achievement leaders' oversee pupils' progress in Years 7 and 8, Years 9 to 11 and the sixth form respectively. Each is supported by a non-teaching 'student support leader'. Several staff have left the school. The school is fully staffed and the number of short-term temporary teachers has been greatly reduced.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have maintained the trajectory of improvement reported at the previous monitoring inspection. Behaviour, attendance and teaching all continue to improve and there are now early signs of improving pupils' progress in some year groups.

Leaders know the school well. Their self-evaluation is honest and accurately identifies and prioritises the areas that need to improve. The school improvement plan is detailed and clearly spells out the actions that leaders will take to secure further improvement. Senior leaders understand their revised responsibilities and the areas for which they are accountable. Effective line management from the headteacher is ensuring a greater degree of consistency from senior leaders.

Well-focused training and extra support for staff is seeing teaching continue to improve. Leaders have an accurate view of where the strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie and they are targeting extra help to those areas most in need of attention. Teachers told inspectors that they value leaders' clear expectations of lesson planning. Pupils told inspectors that teaching is improving in most subjects and is already much better than it was last year.

Assessment systems are improving, especially in key stage 4 and the sixth form. Here, leaders have some confidence in teachers' assessments and they are able to use this information to identify pupils and students who are falling behind and need extra help. Additional support then helps them catch up. For example, in Year 11, pupils are directed to extra 'enrichment' sessions after school on three afternoons each week where they receive additional support. Pupils told inspectors that they find these sessions helpful.

Teachers' assessments in key stage 3 remain unreliable. Leaders are planning to introduce changes later this year, but in the meantime the quality of assessment varies between subjects and so the information is not helpful to leaders. Consequently, they do not have a clear view of pupils' progress in Years 7 and 8 and are not able to target extra help as effectively as they can in older year groups.

Leaders' analysis of information about behaviour and attendance is not as effective as that for achievement. For example, although leaders have at their fingertips information about incidents of inappropriate behaviour, they do not routinely analyse it. Consequently, they are not always aware of patterns and trends and therefore do not target actions at improving these areas.

Middle leadership is improving. Relatively new heads of faculty understand their roles well and have a clear focus on improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress within their faculties. They value the support and guidance they receive from senior leaders, delivered through regular line-management meetings with common agendas. Achievement leaders are starting to take a strategic overview of their year groups. They are therefore able to plan extra support for pupils and groups of pupils whose progress is giving cause for concern. This is proving more effective in key stage 4 and the sixth form than in key stage 3.

The previous monitoring inspection reported that leaders had quickly addressed weaknesses in safeguarding practice. This improved practice has now been embedded and a strong culture of keeping pupils safe is developing across the school. An effective safeguarding team works well together. Staff are well trained and vigilant to the signs that pupils might need extra help. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and that they have confidence in staff to support them with any problems they might face.

ECMAT is providing effective support to the school, mainly through its 'director of secondary academies', who has been in post since September 2017. The director of

secondary academies provides direct support and challenge to school leaders. Additionally, she brokers effective support from a variety of sources. In each area where support is being provided, there is evidence that it is beginning to have the desired impact.

ECMAT replaced the school's local governing body with an IAB in September 2017, almost nine months after weaknesses in governance were identified in January's inspection. The IAB has met just once to date and it is therefore too soon to judge its effectiveness or impact. Inspectors found no evidence that this apparent lack of urgency from ECMAT has slowed the school's improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching remains variable across the school, but it is continuing to improve. Teachers are using a common approach to planning lessons and this is providing a greater degree of consistency of experience for pupils. Many, but not all, teachers are now applying the school's marking and feedback policy consistently.

Teachers now have access to information about pupils' abilities and many are using this more effectively to plan activities. Consequently, pupils are increasingly attempting work that is well matched to their academic ability. However, this picture is not consistent across the school. In too many lessons, activities are not well matched to what pupils already understand, know and can do. When this is the case, pupils sometimes finish work quickly and become bored. At other times, tasks are too demanding and pupils, especially lower-attaining pupils, struggle to begin them.

Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally very positive. This is particularly the case in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Here, inspectors observed pupils and students with excellent attitudes to learning, working hard and keen to succeed. Pupils and students value their teachers' support and rise to their high expectations. In lower year groups, pupils' attitudes vary more. Many are excellent, but some are not. Teachers' expectations of younger pupils vary more also. Where expectations are too low, pupils do not work hard enough or produce work of poor quality.

Weaknesses remain in mathematics teaching, although some early signs of improvement are evident. An external review identified weaknesses in the quality assessment in mathematics. Support brokered by ECMAT is currently seeking to address this issue as well as further improving the quality of teaching across the department.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour continues to improve. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and inspectors observed many examples of impeccable behaviour in class, especially in

Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. However, some disruption of lessons remains, more in the younger years and when teachers have not planned lessons well to take into account pupils' abilities.

The school is generally calm between lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime. Inspectors observed a little disobedience and defiance, but members of staff dealt with this well. Leaders' use of fixed-term exclusion remains high as they seek to embed good standards of behaviour across the school. Their efforts are proving successful. For example, during the inspection, inspectors observed an evacuation of the school following a fire alarm. Pupils left the building quickly and calmly as they had been instructed to do.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is rare and that they have confidence in staff to deal with any that happens. They said that behaviour has improved considerably and that serious disruption of lessons is now rare.

Attendance has improved this year and is currently close to the previous year's national average for secondary schools. Attendance in the sixth form, which was criticised in January's inspection report, has improved considerably. It is now higher than in the main school. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains lower than that of other pupils and this remains an area in need of improvement.

Leaders' analysis of data relating to behaviour and attendance is not as sharp as their use of data about pupils' progress. For example, although incidences of inappropriate behaviour are logged, this information is not analysed to see where patterns and trends exist. Consequently, remedial action is not well targeted at issues that need it. Similarly, although incidences of bullying are recorded, this is not done in a way that enables leaders to see whether the number is increasing or decreasing.

Outcomes for pupils

Unvalidated GCSE outcomes for 2017 were very weak, as leaders had expected. Pupils underachieved in most subjects, and disadvantaged pupils made very slow progress in almost all subjects. However, non-disadvantaged pupils made reasonable progress in several option subjects. Standards of attainment rose a little in English and mathematics compared with the previous year, but this still represented slow progress given these pupils' starting points.

Current pupils are now beginning to make better progress. This is particularly evident in Years 10 and 11. Better teaching, improving intervention and strong attitudes to learning are contributing to pupils' progress accelerating. The school's assessment data indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are much better placed than those in Year 11 in the last academic year. Inspection evidence confirms this to be the case. In particular, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress and the

differences between boys' and girls' progress are beginning to diminish as boys' progress accelerates.

The school's assessment information for pupils in Years 7 and 8 is not reliable. Consequently, leaders do not currently have a detailed view about how well pupils and groups of pupils are progressing. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils' progress is currently more variable in the lower year groups because of some weaker teaching and less consistently good attitudes from pupils.

Students in the sixth form continue to make reasonable progress. They make good progress on academic courses and their progress on vocational courses is now improving. Students who retake GCSE examinations in English or mathematics are usually successful in improving their grade.

External support

ECMAT has brokered a range of effective external support for the school that is contributing well to the school's improvement. Tudor Grange Academy, Solihull is providing support and professional development for middle leaders. Wood Green Academy has reviewed assessment within mathematics and will soon be doing so within English and science. Woden Primary School is supporting leaders in ensuring that the curriculum in Year 7 builds effectively on pupils' experiences in key stage 2.

ECMAT has additionally provided direct support from its director of secondary academies and from other staff. It has reviewed the science department and also teaching and learning across the school. It is shortly to provide an additional member of the senior leadership team. The aim of this post is to build capacity in a number of areas, including provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.