

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Kim Donovan-Maddix
Interim Executive Principal
Elutec
Yew Tree Avenue
Rainham Road South
Dagenham East
Essex
RM10 7FN

Dear Ms Donovan-Maddix

Special measures monitoring inspection of Elutec

Following my visit with Sarah Parker and Julie Steele, Her Majesty's Inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 January 2018, 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 March 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plans are not fit for purpose.

It is recommended that newly qualified teachers are appointed or deployed only if they are mentored and monitored by the school's support partners.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for Barking and Dagenham.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - formulating urgently an effective strategic plan to improve the school
 - senior leaders holding staff more clearly to account for the progress and learning of pupils, and students in the sixth form
 - ensuring that leaders and governors can show the impact of funded initiatives on the progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged.
- Improve teaching and assessment and its impact on pupils' and students' learning and achievement by:
 - teachers having consistently good subject knowledge and appropriate training provided when this is not the case
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are well trained, are deployed appropriately and work effectively with teachers to support pupils' learning, especially those who have complex needs
 - middle leaders checking regularly and consistently that teaching is of good quality
 - improving the teaching of literacy skills across the curriculum
 - supporting all staff to promote a consistently calm learning atmosphere, where pupils are encouraged to be more actively engaged in their own learning
 - staff making full use of the specialist teaching facilities so that pupils, and students in the sixth form, have regular opportunities to hone their practical skills.
- Improve pupils' personal development and behaviour by:
 - supporting all staff to promote an environment where pupils take responsibility for their own good conduct
 - improving the attendance and punctuality of identified pupils
 - reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions
 - ensuring the curriculum and structure of the school day engage and motivate pupils
 - promoting the school in a way that encourages pupils to attend and stay on to courses in the sixth form, while being clear about what is required for success on these courses.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 January 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised management documents. They met with the interim executive principal, chair of governors, and the chief executive officer of Partnership Learning. Inspectors visited 19 lessons, observing some of these jointly with the interim executive principal, vice principal and assistant principal. A learning walk was undertaken to look at the use and effectiveness of the pupil premium. They met with a group of middle leaders and held informal discussions with staff and pupils. Inspectors examined the school's records of safeguarding checks made on staff and looked at other aspects of safeguarding. This included procedures for supporting pupils with medical conditions.

Context

Immediately after the section 5 inspection, an interim executive committee (IEC) was appointed. An experienced head of a local sixth-form consortium was engaged as interim executive principal to support the school for two days a week. School improvement support was brokered through Partnership Learning, a local multi-academy trust. During the autumn term, the principal resigned. She left her post on 31 December 2017. An interim principal was appointed for one term, starting on 1 January 2018. An advertising campaign for the permanent principal post is imminent, with a view to appointing for an April 2018 start.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

When the IEC was appointed, the intention was that it should fulfil all functions of the governing body. In practice, the IEC has taken only particular aspects of that work, such as school improvement and key decisions about staffing. The governing body has remained operational; furthermore, members of the IEC are also members of the governing body. By their own admission, this situation has the potential for significant overlap and confusion.

A further confusion is that the chief executive officer and an adviser from Partnership Learning, together with the interim executive principal, are voting members of the IEC. A key purpose of the IEC is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement. This represents a conflict of interest because, in effect, they are holding themselves to account for the quality of their own work.

Inspectors recognise some of the external complications that have led to this situation. The trust still has a significant financial deficit; this has been one of the barriers to Elutec relaunching as a full member of the Partnership Learning multi-academy trust. Plans are now under discussion (but not resolved) for Elutec to

become an associate member of Partnership Learning with a brief for bringing about rapid improvement over a three-year period. However, the current situation, coupled with changes in leadership personnel, has contributed to the slow pace of progress.

Inspectors have no doubt that the interim executive principal and other leaders have taken a number of actions since the section 5 inspection. The tightening of behaviour and discipline expectations has had a positive effect. Exclusions have reduced and attendance figures have also improved.

Other initiatives have had some impact on the school's management operations. For example, the new assessment process – based on pupils' 'minimum expected progress grades' (MEPG) – has been taken on board by staff and has informed challenging conversations between senior leaders and middle managers. However, this information has not been linked to, or led to significant improvements in, the quality of day-to-day classroom teaching and the quality of pupils' work. Summary information shown to inspectors suggested that the majority of Year 11 pupils are working below their MEPGs in most subjects. Exceptions included the single sciences of biology, chemistry and physics which are taken by the most able pupils. The pupil premium review was carried out in a timely fashion and a new pupil premium coordinator appointed for September 2017. However, in practice, actions to improve outcomes for these pupils, through interventions and through improved classroom practice, have not been urgent enough. A review of provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has only just been conducted. This is despite SEN provision being raised as a significant concern in the section 5 inspection. A new special educational needs coordinator has just been appointed, but she has yet to undergo the necessary training and qualifications needed for this role.

Significant curriculum changes are spoken of but have yet to be actioned. A proposal has been made to expand the age range of the school to include Year 9 pupils from September 2018. To date, only six pupils have indicated interest in joining. This is not a viable number. The basic shape of the school timetable remains the same. This includes a confusing arrangement in the middle of the day whereby pupils take their lunch at three different times. Bizarrely, sixth-form students have their lunch break in the middle of a lesson. Not only is this disruptive to learning, but also the arrangement means that additional staff duties are required at lunchtime. In a small school with a small staff, this is a poor use of resources.

When the school was placed in special measures, governors submitted a statement of action to Ofsted. This was judged unfit for purpose by Her Majesty's Inspectors. The revised statement, seen on this inspection, meets requirements in that it outlines actions to be taken and has clear success criteria. However, it does not detail costings for new initiatives. Nor does it show to whom middle and senior leaders will be accountable for the impact of their actions. Given the school's

financial predicament and the confusion surrounding governance accountability, this lack of detail only exacerbates the lack of clarity about the school's leadership. For these reasons, plans for the school's improvement are not fit for purpose.

Safeguarding

The school's central record of personnel checks continues to meet safeguarding requirements. However, other issues came to light during this inspection that brought into doubt the understanding of safeguarding among staff. In the engineering area, fire exits were not signposted; moreover, these doors were kept locked by staff despite the fact that pupils were in the workshop. Procedures for signing out sixth-form students when they leave the premises were found to be informal and inconsistent. Finally, information for staff about pupils with medical needs was found to lack detail. Action taken when dealing with medical emergencies lacked urgency and record-keeping of these incidents was confused. While some of these concerns were addressed during the inspection, they indicate that a thorough review of all safeguarding processes and staff training is necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Provisional examination results for 2017 suggest that pupils underachieved considerably. Inspectors recognise the specialist curriculum followed by this university technical college and understand that progress measures take into account three years when pupils were learning in other schools. For this reason, inspectors were particularly keen to observe the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and in work over time. What they saw matched the published data, in that pupils were making considerably less progress than should be expected.

Throughout the school and across subjects, with few exceptions, inspectors saw lack of challenge and low expectations. In an engineering lesson, pupils were making a message holder by cutting pieces of wood to a prescribed template. They had not been involved in the design of this artefact and they did not understand the principles behind its construction. They were not required to question or think about the process for themselves.

In a computer science lesson, pupils had a simple process explained to them at length, wrote brief notes, but did not explore the concepts in a practical manner. The great majority of pupils in this and in other lessons appeared disengaged with learning and understandably bored. While teachers showed sound knowledge of subject matter, many did not demonstrate understanding of how to teach their subject effectively. Whole-school strategies, such as extended writing, and green and purple pen marking, have been embraced by staff. These have had some impact on improving standards of literacy but have also detracted from the quality of subject-specific learning. This is because they have taken too much time from the development of other specialist skills and knowledge. Oracy remains

underdeveloped, as does reading. Reading for pleasure is not promoted effectively and the school still does not have a library. Plans for a rapid reading scheme are in place, but this strategy has not yet started.

In contrast to the magnificent school building and impressive technology equipment available, teaching still suffers from a lack of resources. English teaching is conducted largely through photocopied worksheets. Pupils told inspectors that they do not have books for wider reading. In September, the department changed from working in exercise books to loose-leaf files, but it is now reverting to exercise books. In other subjects, inspectors saw a paucity of textbooks. Furthermore, despite the school having excellent workshop facilities and every pupil having their own laptop computer, these resources are still not being exploited as they should. Pupils told inspectors that in computer science and in engineering they spend the majority of their time at desks engaging in theory and written work, rather than developing their understanding through practical tasks. In a few classrooms, pupils' work is displayed and celebrated, but in many others, and around the school generally, display is limited. Opportunities are missed to promote learning or enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

In most classrooms visited, teachers were aware of the pupils who had SEN and/or disabilities. They also knew which pupils were eligible for the pupil premium. However, inspectors saw little evidence that this knowledge is being used to target resources or tailor activities to raise these pupils' achievement. Little was seen of teaching assistants being used to provide appropriate support to meet pupils' individual needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inspectors were impressed with the maturity shown by pupils. Many came forward voluntarily, speaking to inspectors with confidence. Behaviour in lessons was always compliant. They presented themselves well, showing pride in their appearance. Attendance has improved, reflecting the firmer line taken since the last inspection. Behaviour seen around the school site during this inspection was orderly although, at times, inspectors felt that this behaviour was imposed by staff, rather than self-directed by pupils. Records show that there have been some inappropriate cases of physical and verbal bullying since the section 5 inspection but that these are on the decline. Occasionally, pupils engaged in low-level chat or went off task, for example by checking their mobile telephones. Inspectors did not believe that any of this behaviour was wilful, but rather because the pupils were not being challenged or captivated by the teaching.

Sixth-form students who spoke with inspectors said that, in their view, improvements to the school since September have been minimal. They commented that they still have insufficient opportunities to improve their practical skills or benefit from workplace learning.

External support

Support from Partnership Learning has enabled staff from Elutec to visit other schools in the trust and observe good practice. An experienced leader in engineering has been appointed for one day a week in an advisory capacity. Clear systems for assessment and behaviour have been introduced, building on interim leaders' experience in other schools. Evidence seen during this inspection suggests that significant impact of these systems on the quality of pupils' learning has yet to be seen.

Priorities for further improvement

- Conduct an urgent and full review of all safeguarding processes and practices, ensuring that any recommendations are implemented swiftly, and staff training put in place.
- Reach agreement with the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education about the longer-term position of the school, ensuring that school improvement responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear.