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23 February 2018

Dr Jo Trevenna  
Principal  
Sir Herbert Leon Academy  
Fern Grove  
Bletchley  
Milton Keynes  
Buckinghamshire  
MK2 3HQ

Dear Dr Trevenna

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Herbert Leon Academy**

Following my visit with John Burridge, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 February 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board and the chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust, 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

Gary Holden  
**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 third monitoring inspection on 7 February 2018 to 8 February 2018**

### **Evidence**

Over two days, inspectors observed learning and teaching in 20 classes in all key stages. All observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders to discuss the impact of their actions in addressing the areas for improvement listed in the annex. The lead inspector met with a group of teachers, and both inspectors spoke to pupils about their learning and personal development.

The lead inspector held a short meeting with the chair of the local governing board on the first day of the inspection, and conducted a longer telephone interview with her the following day. A discussion was held with the headteacher of The Bridge Academy and a telephone call made to a representative of the Christian Foundation to find out about the progress and attendance of pupils from the school who attend alternative provision.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, current assessment information, the school development plan and minutes of the local governing board. Pupils' learning over time was evaluated by scrutinising a sample of their work. Inspectors also reviewed safeguarding procedures at the school.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new head of mathematics has been appointed and taken up her post. A new associate assistant principal joined the school in January to oversee teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science. The previous head of science left at Christmas. A new leader for science has been appointed and will start in April 2018. An associate assistant principal, who will teach science and take the lead on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, is also due to take up her post in April.

Six teachers left at Christmas and three started in January. Some classes continue to be taught by long-term supply or non-specialist teachers.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Senior leaders have acted with resolve to address the areas for improvement noted in the last inspection and subsequent monitoring inspections. For example, since the previous monitoring inspection, they have taken decisive action to tackle remaining weaknesses in the quality of teaching. However, leaders recognise that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains variable.

Leaders continue to improve the accuracy of their self-evaluation. This is because the information that senior leaders collect about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, attendance and behaviour is sharper and more reliable than previously. Consequently, leaders are able to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision and outcomes with greater precision.

Following the last monitoring inspection, the principal, supported by the local governing board, sensibly adjusted the school's action plan to focus more sharply on the remaining areas of weakness in the school's work. The priorities include: continuing to use accurate assessment to improve pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, particularly in core subjects; ensuring that pupils conduct themselves well in and out of lessons; and reducing rates of absence. One teacher commented approvingly that leaders' clarity about the priorities for improvement means that 'we know where we are now'.

Staff value the support that leaders give them. For example, arrangements for staff training now focus much more on teachers' individual needs. Working in small groups, teachers benefit from coaching from leaders and peers focused on specific aspects of their teaching. Teachers also have the opportunity to observe and learn from other colleagues, both in the school and in good and outstanding schools nearby. Teachers say that this more focused approach to staff training is helping them to improve their skills.

Senior leaders have become more adept at tracking the progress that pupils make, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders have more reliable information about how well pupils in all year groups and in all subjects are doing. This has enabled leaders to act more quickly and put in place appropriate interventions to support pupils who may be falling behind.

However, the principal is aware that subject leaders need to take a more active role in driving forward the school's improvement priorities. For example, subject leaders, and those who are responsible for particular aspects of the school's work, do not yet evaluate the impact of their actions sharply enough. As a result, they are not always able to identify how well the interventions they have used to support pupils' progress have worked. The principal rightly recognises that accurate evaluation of impact will enable leaders to make more effective use of funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Senior leaders have been resilient in the face of the continuing turbulence in staffing. By the start of the summer term, leaders expect that the core subjects of English, mathematics and science will be fully staffed by specialist teachers. In the meantime, leaders have sought to minimise the negative impact of gaps in staffing by deploying the specialist teachers that are in the school more flexibly. The sponsoring trust plays an important role in supporting teaching and assessment in the core subjects, with centrally employed staff providing well-received consultancy

and coaching, as well as practical assistance with, for example, the marking of 'mock' examinations.

The local governing board (LGB) had only just begun its work at the time of the previous monitoring visit; it is now well established. The LGB has rightly put the focus of its meetings squarely on evaluating pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and how well pupils behave. Governors are diligent in carrying out their duties. Through their links with specific areas of the school's work, they are able to check for themselves that agreed plans are being implemented. Lines of accountability are clear. The sponsoring trust is represented on the LGB and this ensures clear communication between the two bodies. The trust holds the LGB to account through regular progress reviews. The chair of the LGB also acts as safeguarding governor. She uses her significant expertise in this area to provide helpful challenge and support to the school's designated safeguarding lead.

Safeguarding is effective. Required checks on the suitability of all those who work or volunteer in the school are carried out to a high standard. Staff have received up-to-date training on the major risks that pupils face and are confident about what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. The designated lead for safeguarding works effectively with external agencies, ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive timely support.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

While the quality of teaching has improved steadily since the last inspection, inconsistencies within and between subjects remain. Teaching is generally stronger in vocational and practical subjects than it is in English, mathematics and science.

Where teaching over time is effective, teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan sequences of activities that are well matched to pupils' needs and which help them to make strong progress. For example, in drama, key stage 4 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, were able to complete a challenging performance task because they had been given carefully planned support in the preceding lessons. Teachers are increasingly confident in their use of assessment to plan pupils' next steps. For example, in BTEC sport, teachers use their knowledge of students' current levels to give sixth formers well-targeted advice on how they could improve their work. Students are then given time to act on teachers' suggestions.

Where teaching over time is less effective, pupils are given work to do that is either too hard or too easy for them. This is because teachers have not taken enough account of what pupils already know or are able to do. Teachers' questions do not always require pupils to think deeply or to expand on their answers. Instead, teachers too readily accept one-word or incomplete answers. In some cases, non-specialist or supply teachers do not have the necessary depth of subject knowledge to challenge all pupils, in particular the most able.

The introduction of a common lesson-planning framework has helped teachers to meet pupils' needs more effectively. Teachers like and understand this model and it is helping to reduce inconsistency in teaching across the school. Pupils confirm that, in their view, the quality of teaching has improved this year.

However, when teachers use the framework too rigidly, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. For example, activities set at the start of lessons to settle pupils down sometimes last too long. As a result, pupils do not have enough time to spend on new learning. Teachers do not always spell out clearly enough what it is they want pupils to learn. Consequently, the work pupils are given to do is not well matched to their needs. In addition, pupils, in particular those who have SEN and/or disabilities, are not always given the support they require to be able to apply the new knowledge or skills they have been taught.

Teaching in the sixth form is stronger overall than in the rest of the school. Students follow courses that are well matched to their abilities and interests. Leaders have developed innovative partnerships, for example with the local football league team, to enhance the delivery of vocational courses.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Behaviour is improving. In lessons and around the school, pupils are generally well behaved. Most pupils are polite to visitors and are keen to talk about their work. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm. Pupils usually respond promptly to teachers' instructions. However, a small number of pupils do not try their best in lessons and do not conduct themselves well enough around the school.

The behaviour policy that was introduced at the start of the school year is now well established. For the most part, teachers apply it consistently and pupils understand it. Pupils know that they are expected to work hard, be good team members and show respect. Leaders' records suggest that the number of pupils rewarded for good effort and behaviour is higher than the number punished for infringing school rules.

When the tasks set in lessons are too hard or too easy, some pupils lose concentration and do not try hard enough. Sometimes, pupils chat to their neighbours rather than pay attention to their teacher. Increasingly, teachers challenge such behaviour and ensure that pupils get back on track. However, there are still too many instances where teachers allow pupils to produce work that is incomplete or superficial, or which does not reflect their best effort.

In the main, pupils move around the building sensibly. However, a small number of pupils are still too boisterous in corridors and the dining hall. They jostle each other, use disrespectful language or raise their voices unnecessarily. This creates an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning. Most teachers are assiduous in

challenging such behaviour, but not all staff are consistent in how they maintain good order outside the classroom.

The number of pupils who are given fixed-term exclusions is falling over time, but continues to be higher than the national average. This is partly because leaders and governors have increased their expectations of pupils' conduct and so, for example, will always sanction a pupil for the use of bad language.

Leaders are taking increasingly effective action to promote equality, diversity and respect. Pupils talk with insight about British values and they relish opportunities to play a role in the wider life of the school, for example through membership of the school council or by taking part in the many House competitions. This term, all pupils have attended a talk about the impact of homophobic bullying on victims, which they say had a profound effect on them.

Leaders go to great lengths to track pupils' attendance, identifying patterns and trends, and working closely with the families of pupils who are most frequently absent. Leaders liaise well with other agencies to ensure that parents get joined-up support and challenge to help them to fulfil their duty to send their children to school every day. Leaders' records show that efforts to improve the attendance of pupils with historically very high rates of absence are beginning to bear fruit. Despite leaders' best efforts, however, rates of absence and persistent absence remain higher than seen nationally, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision for all or some of their timetable have seen some improvement in their behaviour and attendance.

Behaviour and attendance in the sixth form are stronger than in the rest of the school. Students value the support they receive from their teachers. Leaders in the sixth form promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, students who took part in a trip to Auschwitz and Bosnia have since made positive contributions to local events on International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Outcomes are improving steadily. In 2017, pupils' progress overall was in line with the national average at key stage 4. In addition, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, did much better than pupils nationally in those subjects that they were able to select. However, pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science was well below that seen nationally.

In order to help to maintain the positive trajectory and improve outcomes in the core subjects, leaders have worked with officers from the trust to put in place increasingly reliable assessment processes. Consequently, leaders are now able to



identify with confidence which subjects and which groups of pupils are making most and least progress.

Pupils are making stronger progress in key stage 3 than in key stage 4. Throughout key stage 3, pupils are matching or exceeding their targets in history, geography, physical education (PE), design technology, music and drama. Girls, pupils for whom English is not their first language, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are making the fastest progress in key stage 3. The difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is diminishing more rapidly than previously in key stage 3.

In key stage 4, pupils do well in vocational or practical subjects such as health and social care, product design, catering and sport. Girls and pupils for whom English is not their first language are doing particularly well in these and other subjects. Work seen in pupils' books and folders, as well as visits to lessons, confirms that pupils are making strong progress in these subjects.

A legacy of weak teaching over time continues to hamper pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science. Although the quality of teaching is improving in these subjects, pupils in key stage 4 are not yet performing in line with the targets that have been set for them. This is because they have many gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders and teachers are going the extra mile to provide additional teaching to plug these gaps in the core subjects. Green shoots can be seen. For example, in English, the most able pupils are currently working at or above their target grades. Their writing is fluent, accurate and thoughtful. In history, work in pupils' books shows that they are able to analyse historical events systematically and sustain balanced arguments in longer pieces of writing.

As a result of the more effective use of pupil premium funding, disadvantaged pupils in key stage 4 are beginning to catch up. However, there are still wide differences between the current progress made by disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Work seen in books suggests that boys are making slower progress than girls. This is because too many boys do not take enough care over their work, and their books contain unfinished work or work that lacks detail.

A few pupils attend alternative provision for all or some of their timetable. They follow an appropriate curriculum and are making progress in line with their targets.

Outcomes in the sixth form are stronger than in the rest of the school. In 2017, students taking A-level academic or vocational courses made progress that was in line with national averages. A higher proportion of students who sat retakes in English or mathematics at GCSE improved their grades than the national average. An increasing proportion of students now go on to university.

## **External support**

The majority of support that the school draws on is provided by the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). Of particular value from leaders' point of view has been the input from a range of officers to improve teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science. Officers from AET have also worked alongside leaders on curriculum development, assessment and provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Leaders have maintained their strong links with the local teaching school. Specialist leaders of education (SLEs) carry out funded work to support improvements in the leadership and teaching of geography. This work is beginning to have a positive impact, evidenced by the fact that a growing number of pupils wish to study geography at A level. SLEs also provide coaching for teachers across the curriculum.

Leaders have also established fruitful links with other AET academies in the region. Teachers from Sir Herbert Leon Academy have been to Charles Warren Academy to observe teaching in key stage 2, while the Maltings and New Rickstones academies have hosted visits from teachers in a number of subjects.