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22 February 2018

Mr Mark Ingham  
Principal  
Exeter – A Learning Community Academy  
Brayford Avenue  
Corby  
Northamptonshire  
NN18 8DL

Dear Mr Ingham

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter – A Learning Community Academy**

Following my visit with Jeannie Haigh, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 30–31 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 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 not 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 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 Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.**

- Improve leadership and management urgently, so that:
  - leaders identify the reasons why pupils are underachieving and so can take the right actions to ensure that the pupils make better progress
  - subject leaders have the knowledge and the opportunities necessary to bring about better teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
  - pupils enjoy a broad curriculum and their skills and knowledge in every subject grow as they move through the school
  - leaders provide accurate reports to governors about the school's performance
  - governors have the skills and confidence to hold leaders to account and to bring about school improvement
  - pupil premium funding is used effectively
  - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve outcomes for all pupils and raise the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - using information about the pupils' performance and the quality of teaching to provide effective training where it is required, particularly in the teaching of mathematics and reading
  - ensuring that the most able pupils receive work that is challenging and enables them to attain high standards
  - ensuring that teachers use lesson time efficiently and give pupils work that enables them to make at least good progress in all subjects
  - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to use and to develop their writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the early years by:
  - ensuring that leaders responsible for the early years make regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching and assessment in the Reception classes
  - ensuring that all necessary training is provided to secure better provision in the Reception classes
  - sharing the good practice evident in the Nursery.
- Improve pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour by reducing the rates of absence and persistent absence.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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 further improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 30 January 2018 to 31 January 2018**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors held meetings with the principal, vice-principals, the leaders with responsibility for the Nursery and Reception classes, the school's attendance officer and the special educational needs coordinator. They met with the chief executive officer of the Woodnewton Academy Trust and the chair of the local governing body. A telephone conversation was held with the chief executive officer of the Inspiring Futures Through Learning Trust (IFTL). Inspectors observed the learning taking place in all year groups, sometimes with school leaders, and scrutinised a range of pupils' books. They spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils in lessons and around school and held a more formal meeting with a group of pupils. Inspectors examined a range of school documentation, including action plans and those relating to safeguarding and to the progress pupils make.

### **Context**

Since the monitoring visit in October 2017, four teachers have left the school and four have been appointed. The leader with responsibility for the Nursery is currently taking maternity leave and another member of staff is fulfilling this role. The attendance officer and premises officer who had just been appointed at the time of the last monitoring visit have taken up their posts. The Woodnewton Academy Trust is currently in consultation with IFTL, with a view to IFTL taking over the Woodnewton Academy Trust. This would mean all the schools in the Woodnewton Academy Trust would become part of IFTL.

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

Leaders, including governors and representatives of the trust, have not taken sufficiently swift or effective action since the monitoring visit in October 2017. They have not improved the quality of teaching and learning well enough. The principal, vice-principals, the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive officer have an accurate view of the school. They recognise that the school has not made sufficient progress since the last monitoring visit.

Leaders have had some difficulty in recruiting permanent high-quality teachers. The two Year 6 teachers left towards the end of the autumn term. One of the vice-principals taught both classes together for the remainder of the term. The classes have had full-time teachers since January 2018. However, difficulty in recruiting staff at the end of last term reduced the capacity of the leadership team. This contributed significantly to slowing the progress that leaders were able to make.

Leaders are not confident that their assessment procedures, including the tracking of the progress pupils make, are fit for purpose. Leaders acknowledge that many of the assessments that are recorded may not be accurate. Although leaders undertake meetings with teachers to review the progress pupils make, they are not making effective use of assessment to evaluate with certainty how well pupils are doing. This means that interventions to support pupils' learning are not reliably based on accurate information about what pupils already know and can do. Leaders recognise that the unreliability of assessments and the lack of understanding some teachers have of assessment must be addressed urgently. It is now imperative that leaders ensure that all teachers are able to both assess pupils' understanding with accuracy and to use this information to inform future learning.

The review of the pupil premium funding that was commissioned following the inspection in November 2016 was challenged by the trust. At the time of my last visit, another review had not been undertaken. The pupil premium review has still not been recommissioned. Too much time has been lost. Leaders do not know how effectively the pupil premium funding is being used to overcome the barriers to learning for the pupils who are entitled to benefit from its use.

Subject leadership has still not begun. There are leaders with responsibility for mathematics and English, including reading, writing and phonics. No other subject leaders have been appointed.

Leaders, including year group leaders, have recently received training to improve their skills in checking on, and improving, the quality of teaching. It is too early for this process to have had a positive impact, but leaders show great enthusiasm for implementing this system across the school quickly.

Following the last monitoring visit, the principal drew up an action plan for improvements. Year group leaders also wrote action plans to coordinate their work with the whole school plan. Senior leaders have reviewed the action plan but it is not fully on track. One vice-principal has started to work alongside year group leaders to evaluate their plans. There is still work to do before a fully successful action planning process brings about the rapid improvements required across the school.

The chair of the local governing body is rightly concerned that the school is not making rapid enough progress, particularly in relation to securing high-quality teaching across the school and rapid progress for pupils. She recognises that the information governors receive about standards is not accurate. Governors are not holding leaders to account with rigour.

The website still does not contain all the relevant information that parents and carers might need and is statutorily required. This includes information relating to the use of the primary physical education (PE) and sport funding, and the use of the pupil premium.

The safeguarding team of senior staff continues to work together and support each other in this important role. Leaders ensure that all the necessary vetting checks take place for adults who start working at the school. They ensure that the appropriate procedures are followed should incidents or concerns arise.

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

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains inconsistent across the school.

Leaders have introduced some new initiatives in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They monitor the quality of provision and share information with teachers in staff meetings, providing some additional information and training. They have not, however, systematically improved the quality of teaching across the school. This means that teachers and teaching assistants who may benefit from focused additional support to fully implement strategies are not receiving it. Leaders have introduced a process for teachers to make the learning clear to pupils at the start of each lesson, for example. However, books show that the learning intention does not always relate closely to the activity.

Leaders plan to introduce a systematic procedure for checking that new approaches and expectations are fully implemented by all staff. This has not yet begun in earnest. Leaders are currently working with an external provider to improve their skills, and those of the year group leaders, to enable them to provide more focused improvement. It is too early to judge if this is effective. Leaders also plan to introduce a precise programme of monitoring and support to accelerate the improvement in the quality of teaching, where this is required.

Too many teachers are not assessing the progress that pupils are making accurately enough. This means that they are not reliably using their knowledge of what pupils understand and can do to move them on to more difficult learning quickly. This means that some pupils, and particularly the most able pupils, are completing work they can easily do.

Leaders have recently implemented new approaches to the teaching of reading and writing. Some staff are trialling the approach and others are keen to get started. Once again, this is too recent for any impact on standards to be seen.

Leaders are confident that staff are keen to improve their practice and benefit from the training they receive. This is having mixed success because leaders have not been stringent in their approach to checking how fully the strategies are implemented.

Where teaching is more effective, teachers use their strong subject knowledge to provide clear explanations to pupils, making effective use of time during lessons.

Some pupils' books indicate that teachers plan sequences of lessons to build pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding systematically, but this is not the case across the school.

An examination of pupils' books and displays around the school shows that pupils study a range of subjects. Pupils learn about famous artists and enjoy topics such as The Egyptians. During the monitoring visit, pupils were learning about papyrus, for example. They were excited at the prospect of making some 'papyrus' for themselves. Pupils' books also show that many teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write at length. Often teachers link this to other areas of learning. Pupils in one year group wrote Victorian diaries and postcards, for example.

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

Leaders have appointed an attendance officer. She has introduced rewards for pupils who come to school regularly. A display in the key stage 2 hall celebrates the attendance of each class. One vice-principal has linked this to learning in mathematics, by representing the information as a graph which is referred to as attendance is discussed during assembly.

Leaders have ensured that gates are closed promptly in the morning. The attendance officer is available by the main entrance door to greet pupils who arrive late to school in the morning. She takes this opportunity to talk to parents about the importance to their child's learning of being at school on time. She has begun to work more closely with parents whose children's attendance is of particular concern.

Leaders are not analysing the effectiveness of the work that the attendance officer is undertaking well enough to be sure what is having the most impact. School information shows that the overall rate of attendance for the school is currently lower than it was for the whole of the last school year. It remains below the national average.

The leadership team has recently introduced a new behaviour policy. Around school and in lessons, the majority of pupils behave well and the school is generally calm. Pupils are polite to visitors and follow instructions from adults sensibly and without fuss.

Where teachers do not plan activities that engage pupils well enough, pupils told inspectors that they were not finding their learning interesting. Other pupils, however, told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school. They like the behaviour system that rewards different kinds of appropriate behaviour and informs their parents electronically so this can also be celebrated at home.

Leaders have introduced a nurture group for some pupils in key stage 2. Pupils engage well with adults. Pupils have been fully involved in naming their group to instil a sense of belonging and pride. During the visit, the inspector was warmly



welcomed into a session where pupils were reading a text and answering questions.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Leaders are unable to evaluate with accuracy whether outcomes for pupils are improving. This is because teachers' assessments of what pupils understand and can do are not accurate. Leaders believe that standards have not risen overall since the last inspection.

Leaders meet with teachers to discuss the progress that pupils make. They plan additional support for pupils where this may be required. They are beginning to track the progress that pupils make from their starting points. It is too soon in the implementation of this system, and assessments are not sufficiently reliable, to judge with certainty whether standards are rising.

While pupils' books show that they make progress over time in English and mathematics, this is still inconsistent between classes. As there are no leaders for subjects other than English and mathematics, leaders do not know how well pupils are doing in any other subjects.

### **External support**

The Woodnewton Academy Trust has not successfully supported the academy with recruiting high-quality permanent teachers. It has not been able to successfully support the academy with bringing about the rapid improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that are urgently required.

The Woodnewton Academy Trust recognises that it does not have the capacity to provide all the support that this academy requires to ensure that it is a good school. With this in mind, the chief executive officer has been proactive in seeking out further partnerships. The trust is currently in discussions with a view to becoming part of an alternative academy trust as soon as possible.

The Woodnewton Academy Trust has provided some useful support to the academy. It has provided funding for an additional member of the support staff team and seconded a teacher from another school in the trust, for example. It has supported leaders in securing opportunities for teachers to check the accuracy of their assessments across the trust. They have supported leaders in securing some funding for training.