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3 April 2018

Mrs Kirsty Jones
Headteacher
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Furzebank Way
Willenhall
West Midlands
WV12 4BD

Dear Mrs Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Willenhall E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with Helen Reeve, Ofsted Inspector and Louise Blackburn, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 13–14 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 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's action plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). I would ask that I am informed of any decisions that may result in the appointment of NQTs before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the raising achievement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Act with urgency to ensure that all pupils are safe at the school by:
  - addressing pupils' poor behaviour through insisting on their adherence to school expectations and gaining the full support of their parents
  - ensuring all staff implement the school's behaviour management policy consistently and effectively, and that this policy offers suitable sanctions and appropriate support and rewards to pupils
  - improving the attendance of pupils, including those in alternative provision, through analysing strategies which have been successful previously, intervening early and working more closely with parents
  - ensuring that pupils receive high-quality information in lessons, and through the pastoral system, that enables them to recognise, avoid and deal with potentially dangerous situations.
- Ensure that the extra funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is used well to raise their achievement rapidly.
- Improve the impact of leadership, including governance, by:
  - becoming more precise in setting and reviewing actions and using this information rigorously for further improvement
  - meeting the statutory duty to deliver careers education, information, advice and guidance, and ensure that those pupils who have currently missed out have additional opportunities to acquire this support
  - check that communication with parents and the publication of information on the website meets statutory requirements
  - ensuring that senior and middle leaders are fully accountable for the necessary and urgent improvements required in safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and achievement.
- Improve the quality of the 16 to 19 study programme by:
  - analysing and improving the assessment system and outcomes for learners following academic courses.
- Improve teaching at key stages 3 and 4 so that outcomes improve rapidly by:
  - embedding a coherent teaching strategy which is applied consistently throughout the school
  - ensuring teaching staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - setting pupils learning tasks which they understand, are suitably challenging,

and that capture their attention so concentration does not diminish.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management might be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 March 2018 to 14 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders. Inspectors also met with representatives of the sponsor who are responsible for governance at the school. A range of documents was evaluated, including leaders' analyses of recent assessments, behaviour and attendance. Records of pupils whose parents have chosen to educate them at home were also scrutinised.

Inspectors observed pupils' learning in lessons across a range of subjects in key stages 3 and 4. Students in key stage 5 were undertaking mock examinations during the inspection. Leaders accompanied inspectors on some visits to lessons. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them in class. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and at social times. Inspectors met pupils formally on three occasions. An inspector visited the school's alternative provision centre which is located nearby.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been relatively few changes to the staff at the school. A small number of teachers have left, or are leaving, and in most cases their posts have been filled. Senior leaders' responsibilities have remained constant. Leaders have decided to admit students to the school's sixth form in September 2018 after not doing so in September 2017. They are seeking applications from Year 11 pupils currently at the school. Leaders intend to offer a range of level 3 academic and applied general qualifications.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders' actions to address the priorities identified at the last inspection are reviewed and evaluated frequently by representatives of E-ACT. Members of the regional achievement board evaluate the impact of leaders' work through close scrutiny of objective evidence. They validate their judgements through routine visits to the school. Consequently, leaders continue to be held to account for their actions. The recently relaunched website includes up-to-date news and information about the school.

Leaders' systems to collect information about how well pupils are doing are becoming increasingly embedded into the school's culture. Routine analysis of regular formal assessments provides detailed information about pupils' progress and attainment. For example, senior leaders provide clear and sharp analysis that identifies where pupils' performance is of most concern. Middle leaders use this information well to plan specific interventions that target key groups of pupils. The

frequency of information collected enables these strategies to be quickly evaluated and provides opportunities to refocus efforts on different groups of pupils. A similar approach is operated by post-16 leaders. Assessment information is routinely shared with sixth-form teachers to identify strategies to support specific students, either in class or through additional learning sessions.

Leaders have ensured that teachers have a better understanding of the barriers facing any disadvantaged pupils they teach. Strategies are in place to support pupils to overcome these barriers. Older pupils who are closest to taking their examinations have been a priority. For example, an academic coaching scheme supports disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are now broadening such interventions to other pupils. These strategies have had some success, although improvements in progress are inconsistent. For example, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils expected to achieve GCSE English and mathematics is increasing, but their overall rates of progress remain lower than for other pupils at the school.

Additional appointments have resulted in coherent leadership of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants are clearer about their roles. Teachers have benefitted from special educational needs training. These changes are beginning to have an impact on pupils' progress. For example, the literacy skills of younger pupils who have received additional support have improved. Also, the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching because they regularly visit lessons. Leaders know where effective learning takes place. They validate their judgements using information from a variety of sources including lesson observations and pupils' work. Leaders identify teachers who require additional support and provide coaching and more formal programmes of support. Teachers receive detailed information about their practice and understand well leaders' expectations. Leaders evaluate their monitoring information and use it to plan strategically further strategies to improve teaching and learning. For example, leaders are currently planning training about developing pupils' resilience and independence to support learning. Colleagues who are new to teaching are well supported with a programme that includes development sessions at a nearby school that is part of the trust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The continued stability of teachers at the school contributes to improvements in the quality of teaching. Teachers follow agreed strategies for the structure of lessons and ways to manage pupils' conduct in lessons. In an increasing number of lessons there is a positive climate for learning. Where strong relationships and mutual respect between teachers and pupils exist, pupils respond well to their teachers and complete tasks willingly. Pupils are successfully held to account in lessons where teachers clearly explain the purpose of learning tasks and have high expectations. When this is the case, teaching is effectively addressing some of the variation in

progress of different groups of pupils. For example, in English, boys are increasingly making similar rates of progress as girls.

There are still variations in the impact of teaching. Teachers have detailed information about pupils' starting points and additional strategies to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. However, staff are not consistently using this information effectively to provide work that challenges appropriately, or to support specific learning needs. Some teachers initially set clear expectations for how pupils should contribute to class discussions, but then do not insist on this throughout the course of a lesson. Similarly, some teachers do not promptly challenge pupils whose attention has wandered from the task in hand. This gives pupils inconsistent messages about what teachers expect. Very occasionally, staff do not model the high levels of respect that are expected of pupils. In such situations, relationships in lessons are less positive relationships, leading to behaviour which does not support pupils' learning. There is also lower quality of teaching and learning in lessons that are taught by supply teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils generally move calmly and sensibly around the school site. They socialise well and relate positively to each other. Staff supervise social times and pupils respond positively and promptly to staff requests. Pupils' arrival and departure from the school is orderly and they behave sensibly in the local area. Pupils demonstrate their pride in the school because they wear their uniforms smartly and keep the school site free from litter. Parents who spoke to inspectors noted that the behaviour at the school is improving and their children are happy at the school, particularly due to the positive relationships they have established with staff.

Leaders continue to ensure that improving pupils' attendance remains a key priority. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced of late, yet remains too high. Specific strategies to improve attendance have had a positive impact, for example, in increasing the proportion of pupils who have not missed a day of school this year. Other strategies, including supporting pupils with travel to school, have had a positive impact on some pupils whose attendance is of most concern. Pupils know being at school is important, and are aware of leaders' actions to improve attendance. Pupils say that if they have been away from school most teachers help them catch up with their work, but not consistently so. Sixth-form students' attendance is closely monitored by post-16 leaders. They routinely identify patterns in attendance and support and challenge students accordingly.

In the past, letters written to a small number of parents have not outlined clearly enough the school's actions to improve attendance. Such letters have not made sufficiently clear to parents the implications of deciding to educate their children at home. A very small number of parents make the decision to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. When this is the case, leaders have in place procedures to make reasonable enquiries to establish pupils' whereabouts. Systems

ensure that these pupils' attendance has been closely monitored and visits made to check on pupils by an appropriate member of staff for the time that pupils remain on the school's roll. Leaders' current systems to record that such procedures have been completed are not as well established as they might be. As a result, leaders' monitoring and evaluation of actions taken before parents decide to home educate their children are not as robust as for other aspects of the school's work to safeguard pupils.

There has been a reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions since the last monitoring inspection as pupils' behaviour continues to improve. The school's information about behaviour also reflects improvements. For example, the number of pupils removed from lessons due to concerns over conduct has reduced. Pupils continue to take more responsibility for their conduct, supported by pastoral staff and form tutors. Pastoral leaders are developing a range of strategies to improve the school's culture and ethos further. Pupils are clear about the school's rewards and sanctions, and comment that behaviour continues to improve. They are motivated by the rewards system, and would welcome the opportunity to redeem their reward points for higher-value items. Sixth-form students now receive regular personal, social and health education. Sessions are planned that address issues such as safeguarding and mental health in an age-appropriate manner.

Leaders have introduced an approach to systematically and objectively identify pupils who may be vulnerable. Staff are able to focus appropriate interventions on individual pupils' needs. Staff regularly review key information, including attendance and behaviour, to monitor how well these pupils are doing. Although this approach is relatively recent, reviews demonstrate the effect of strategies used to support individual pupils.

Key staff have been appointed to develop and implement a coherent careers strategy at the school. Leaders have ensured that all pupils in Year 11 have received an independent and impartial careers guidance interview. Leaders are using this information to support pupils, for example ensuring that applications for college are completed and submitted on time. Sixth-form students now receive information about a range of possible destinations, including higher education and apprenticeships. Students recognise the value of these sessions and say that they feel much better prepared for the next steps of their education or training than they did at the start of the year. Leaders have started to review the impact of the careers strategy. Leaders recognise that a more detailed analysis should include information about pupils' destinations after they leave the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Overall rates of progress are improving for pupils this year, albeit from a very low starting point. Recently, this improvement has been more marked for pupils in Year 11 than Year 10. Such improvements reflect the additional support and interventions that are prioritised for pupils who are approaching their examinations.

However, there are variations in how well different groups of pupils are doing. For example, pupils whose prior attainment is high are progressing at a much faster rate than other pupils. In English and mathematics, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are now making better progress than they have in the past. However, differences in progress between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are increasing. Currently, pupils' attainment overall in English and mathematics is improving in line with leaders' expectations. Variations between the rates of progress of different groups of pupils diminish lower down the school.

The overall progress of key stage 4 pupils in the English Baccalaureate element of the government's progress and attainment measures remains lower than for other aspects of key performance measures. This reflects the legacy of poor advice and guidance provided to pupils in previous years. This situation is likely to have an adverse impact on the performance of these pupils. Leaders are clear that Year 9 pupils' options will include a range of subjects which will enable them to demonstrate their success in the future.

Students in Year 13 are currently making progress in line with leaders' expectations. The average grade that students achieve in the assessments has risen this year in academic and applied general qualifications. Leaders' analysis indicates that students' performance now compares favourably with national averages for students with similar starting points.

External support

The school continues to benefit from support in several key areas provided by E-ACT, who sponsor the school. Leaders continue to value and make effective use of the support offered. For example, continued work by one of the trust's system leaders has provided SEN training opportunities for staff. This support has also brought about greater robustness in the identification of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders continue to make effective use of contacts with colleagues from other trust schools. For example, leaders work together to check the standard and consistency of questions and the marking of formal assessments. This work supports improvements in the validity and reliability of leaders' monitoring information.

Leaders continue to make effective use of support that is external to the trust. An independent school improvement partner provides an external validation of leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching. They visit the school and accompany leaders on learning walks and discuss their findings. Another partner supports the school's coaching programme, for example helping identify which staff will participate in the programme. This work is improving the quality of teaching at the school.

Priorities for further improvement

■ Make clearer to parents the implications of deciding to educate their children at

home. Evaluate more robustly processes that record actions taken to support these pupils as long as they remain on the school's role.