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6 June 2018

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Dear Ms Donovan-Maddix

Special measures monitoring inspection of Elutec

Following my visit with Russ Henry, Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 2 and 3 May 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim board, 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 their 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 that 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 second monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 May 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the newly appointed principal and the vice-principal. The lead inspector also met with the chief executive officer of Partnership Learning and had a telephone conversation with the chair of the interim board. Meetings were held with the assistant principal and with staff responsible for the education of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Meetings were held with managers responsible for attendance and safeguarding. An officer from the local authority took part in the meeting about SEN provision. Discussions took place with teachers and pupils during the school day.

Inspectors visited 20 lessons. Some of these visits were undertaken jointly with the newly appointed principal, the vice-principal or the assistant principal.

Context

The day before this inspection took place, the interim executive principal was appointed as the new permanent principal. She has taken up this full-time position with immediate effect. The interim principal is leaving after a short handover period.

Agreement has been reached regarding the status and responsibilities surrounding the school's governance. Although the Elutec Trust retains legal responsibility for the school (including its charitable status), all powers of day-to-day governance have been transferred to the interim board. Three members of the interim board are members of the old governing body. A fourth member, appointed in April as the new chair, has no previous connection with the school. The chief executive of Partnership Learning and the principal (formerly the interim executive principal) are now non-voting members of the board.

A restructuring of the school's management arrangements is proposed for September 2018. A significant proportion of the teaching staff have resigned and will be leaving before the new academic year starts. Plans to expand the age range of the school in September 2018, to include Year 9 pupils, have been postponed. The number of pupils expected to join Year 10 in September 2018 is, again, well below what was planned when the school was opened.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Compared to the situation at the last monitoring inspection, greater clarity and less confusion exist about the school's governance arrangements. The appointment of a new independent chair is a step forward. However, the huge financial debt – accumulated since the school opened – overshadows any decision about the school's future. The situation has reached an impasse. A number of multi-academy

trusts, including Partnership Learning, have shown interest in taking on Elutec. However, none are willing to take on the school in its current situation. The new principal's proposed restructuring of staffing and management is intended to prevent the debt from increasing further but it means that the curriculum remains constricted. Inspectors recognise the legal complications around this situation. Nevertheless, it is clear that, as things stand, the quality of education is still inadequate. The school does not have the capacity to improve.

Immediately after the last monitoring visit, an officer from the local authority undertook a safeguarding review. Actions taken included a thorough overhaul of systems for dealing with the recording of medical emergencies. A number of staff training sessions have taken place and signing-in and signing-out procedures for staff and pupils are improved. Appropriate fire exit signage has been installed in the engineering area. Inspectors found that all fire exit doors were unlocked, bar one. Although this door could be unlocked by the turn of a knob, the way to this door was through a darkened workshop. This indicates that safety arrangements in the school require constant monitoring, lest any aspect be allowed to slip.

Inspectors were satisfied that concerns about pupils' safety are referred to external agencies by individual leaders when necessary. However, scrutiny of records and discussion with staff suggest that strategies for overseeing pupils' well-being are not joined up.

In meetings with inspectors and through the documentation they provided, leaders responsible for the pupil premium and SEN funding were unable to explain fully how their budgets were spent. Where spending was identified, leaders found it difficult to explain how this had impacted specifically on the pupils for whom it was intended. At the last monitoring inspection, it was judged that actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were not urgent enough. This remains the case.

At the time of this visit, only one of the three proposed assistant principal posts was filled for September 2018. One of the vacant posts includes leadership of the science and engineering departments. The special educational needs coordinator, the assistant head of sixth form and the computing teacher roles are vacant. All teaching posts in the engineering department are vacant. In all, this means that over half of the teaching and management posts in this small school are unfilled. This raises further doubts about the school's capacity to provide pupils with an acceptable quality of education.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the last inspection, leaders have introduced regular staff training sessions with an emphasis on the quality of teaching. These have had some impact, for example in more focused starts to lessons. Inspectors saw some examples of stronger teaching and learning, for example in English, where pupils engaged well in a discussion about 'Macbeth'. The strategy to improve pupils' writing is also having a

positive impact in English. However, the underdevelopment of pupils' reading skills remains a concern. Discussions with pupils suggest that reading for pleasure is not promoted adequately by the school. A classroom has been allocated for improving reading and all recommended books have been purchased from the scheme's list. However, in the inspectors' views, not all of these books are likely to appeal to or be suitable for Elutec pupils. Furthermore, the range of non-fiction books in the reading centre is limited. Insufficient thought has been given to choosing books that support the school's specialism or broaden pupils' cultural understanding. Finally, this reading improvement scheme is still in the very early stages of implementation. Given that reading was identified as an issue over a year ago, progress in addressing this area for improvement is too slow.

In too many instances, teaching is still characterised by lack of challenge and low expectations. Tasks are too often of a low level or take too long to complete. This was exemplified in an engineering class seen by inspectors. During this monitoring inspection, pupils were still making the simple wooden message holder that they had started during the last visit in January. As they had not been involved in the design of the product and were simply assembling the pieces from a prescribed template, this was not helping them make rapid progress. In a Year 11 information technology class visited, the teacher's records show that, with just weeks to go, only a very small proportion of course projects had been completed. A large proportion of projects had no evidence recorded. Unsurprisingly, most pupils in the class were predicted to be ungraded in the final assessment. In a Year 10 biology class, pupils reported that they rarely did experiments. Work had not been assessed for some time, and inspectors noticed that the class had covered the same work last term.

As at the last monitoring inspection, inspectors saw little evidence of additional adult support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The use of targeted resources and tailored activities to meet these pupils' needs is the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, while teachers' planning shows which pupils they believe to have SEN and/or disabilities or to be in receipt of the pupil premium, this information is not always accurate. In some classes, inspectors found that the information proffered by teachers about particular pupils was incorrect.

Attendance at the after-school extension and intervention activities is poor. These interventions are not aimed at those who would benefit most, such as pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged. Some – for example the sixth-form further mathematics class – have a clear focus on ambitious academic achievement. A few activities, such as the field gun crew, provide interesting experiences not found in the everyday curriculum. A number of careers visits have taken place or are planned. However, the range of activities on offer is limited. Numbers taking part in these activities are low. The work experience programme has been deferred until the summer term. Given the rationale and purpose of the school, pupils are right to be disappointed with what they have been offered.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Despite the weak educational diet provided, many pupils continue to show sensible behaviour in lessons and around the school. Incidents of poor behaviour continue to decrease. Inspectors noted that senior staff management of behaviour at break and lunchtime was much more discreet than at the last monitoring inspection. There was no indication that good behaviour was being imposed on pupils, as was the case at the last monitoring inspection. Changes made to the school day since the last inspection, with the whole school now breaking for lunch at the same time, have made a positive difference. They have enhanced the school's sense of community. This is not to say that behaviour is always good, though. Leaders have recently found it necessary to impose a ban on aerosols due to alleged misuse. At the end of the school day, senior leaders needed to intervene because of pupils performing 'wheelies' on their bicycles across both sides of the main road outside the school building.

Leaders showed inspectors their planning and schedule for providing pupils with personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. The intention is for this programme to be delivered during daily tutor sessions. In practice, this is not happening. Pupils told inspectors that the time is spent completing homework or reading. Simply, pupils are not provided with adequate PSHE education.

The school prospectus promises that extension activities offer 'a wide range of activities that are designed to enable the pursuit and development of interests outside the main curriculum'. In practice, the range of activities is narrow and based largely around the timetabled curriculum. Given that the university technical college curriculum does not include humanities or arts subjects, this raises concerns about pupils' limited spiritual and cultural development. The school does not teach religious education. Leaders could not tell inspectors whether or not they should be doing so as part of the school's funding agreement.

Attendance during the inspection was below average, even including the small number of pupils being educated in alternative provision. Class teachers are responsible for taking a register in every lesson. Scrutiny of registers taken during the inspection showed that absence codes are not used consistently by staff and registers are not always accurate.

Outcomes for pupils

School leaders are of the view that this year's results will show current pupils making better progress than their peers did in 2017. Nevertheless, the most recent assessments suggest that, in all but three subjects, the majority of Year 11 pupils are working one or two grades below their minimum expected target grades. In Year 10, the assessments made by teachers in March have yet to be entered into the school's system and have not, therefore, been analysed. However, the

information analysed in January suggests that a significant proportion of pupils are underachieving across all subjects.

Although numbers taking individual courses in the sixth form are small, assessment information taken in April 2018 suggests that over 60% of all Year 13 examination entrants are working below their minimum expected target grades. Only around 12% of entrants are working above the minimum grade expected. This is not good enough.

External support

The local authority has been active through the safeguarding review and through recent support for the SEN leaders. However, inspection evidence shows that this support has not led to all safeguarding issues being resolved, or to rapid improvements in SEN provision.

Since the last monitoring visit, support from Partnership Learning has been restricted to the brokering of support from the acting executive principal and to the formation of the interim board.