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Mr James Hughes
The E-Act Burnham Park Academy
Opendale Road
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Buckinghamshire
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Dear Mr Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of The E-Act Burnham Park Academy

Following my visit with Mark Roessler, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 5–6 June 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 July 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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the regional education director for E-Act multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2016.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership across the school by:
 - evaluating the impact of current actions and refining them so that they focus on what will make the most rapid improvements to the school
 - ensuring that leaders' areas of responsibility are clear, so that they can be held increasingly to account.
- Embed and develop recent actions to improve behaviour and attendance, so that more pupils attend school regularly and exclusions are reduced.
- Improve the consistency of high-quality teaching across the school, so that it leads to improved outcomes for all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, by:
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour are
 - consistently high across the school
 - making sure that teachers use information about prior learning to plan work that more closely meets pupils' individual starting points.

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.

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 5 June 2018 to 6 June 2018

Evidence

Inspectors made visits to observe learning across the school. On most occasions, they were accompanied by a senior member of staff. Inspectors also undertook short, unaccompanied visits to classes to check pupils' behaviour and on a separate occasion they made short visits focused on provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, including the checks made before staff are employed, improvement planning, pupils' progress, and the school's evaluation of its progress to date. Inspectors also met separately with the headteacher, senior leaders, leaders responsible for disadvantaged pupils' achievement, subject leaders, a group of staff, a group of parents and carers, a group of pupils, and the regional education director for the trust, along with one of the trust's national advisers. Members of the raising achievement board (RAB) who are trust-wide 'system leaders' joined the school's leaders in the safeguarding meeting, the meeting on outcomes and the meeting about provision for pupils in 'aspire' and 'enterprise'.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, an assistant headteacher has taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). A new subject leader in mathematics was appointed just after Easter 2018. The science subject leader, who was new in post at the monitoring visit in December 2017, is currently on maternity leave. Five teaching staff have left since the previous monitoring visit.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Effective leadership throughout the school is giving rise to improvements across a number of areas. The provision for pupils who have SEN and/ or disabilities has improved, subject leadership is getting better and the number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped. However, despite leaders' tremendous efforts, they have not managed to recruit subject specialist teachers for some curriculum areas. Linked to this, some teaching in key stage 3, particularly in Year 8, needs further improvement.

Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has developed further in confidence and capability. Senior leaders are effectively led and managed by the headteacher who regularly checks the impact of their actions. Senior leaders are securing improvements through working alongside subject leaders, guiding them and enhancing their expertise well. They are sensibly focusing their joint efforts to boost the skills of weaker teachers and those teaching outside their subject specialism. This approach has worked well for a number of teachers but not for all of this group. Close and effective collaboration between senior and subject leaders is leading to a step-change in the way subject leaders approach their roles. They

are now more focused on leading improvements across the subject areas they manage than they were in the past. In addition, support from senior leaders has assisted subject leaders new in post to settle in quickly. New leaders are starting to make a positive difference.

Subject leaders now monitor the quality of teaching in the subjects they lead, which means they have a deeper and more distinct understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. However, the way subject leaders track pupils' progress is more effective in English, mathematics and science than it is in other subjects. Subject leaders rightly identify that some teaching in key stage 3 requires further development. Some subject leaders have sharp and well-considered action plans in place which are assisting them well in prioritising improvements in teaching.

Pupils are continuing to benefit from the curriculum changes made soon after the school was placed in special measures. The 'enterprise' curriculum effectively supports pupils with a range of needs in Year 9. The focus placed on improving the 'aspire' curriculum, for pupils in Year 7 and 8 who have SEN and/or disabilities, has paid off. One reason for this is the strong and effective collaboration between the 'system leader' in the trust with primary expertise and the SENCo. Now teachers and assistants are much clearer about where 'aspire' pupils have gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding in English and mathematics. They are using this to tailor pupils' learning so that any gaps can be filled as quickly as possible. Leaders are reviewing the curriculum to check that innovations continue to meet pupils' needs. They have astutely recognised that pupils in the 'aspire' programme need to build their knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subjects other than mathematics and English.

Assisted well by the recommendations from the second review of pupil premium funding, leaders' actions have started to make a positive difference to provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. For example, there are now a number of approaches aimed at removing the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face, and also measures to boost attendance of targeted pupils. The responsible leader systematically reviews the effect that initiatives are having, swiftly making changes if additional funding is not having the expected impact.

The systems in place for trust leaders to hold school leaders to account are now bedded in and working well. The raising achievement board (RAB), consisting of key 'system leaders' and the regional director, has an accurate view of the school. This is because of the stringent checks carried out when RAB members visit the school. Of note is the way these checks are used to tailor the focus for the future support that 'system leaders' will give to leaders and teachers. The impact of the support provided is rigorously monitored and evaluated by the regional director, who works closely with one of the senior advisers for the trust. The post-Ofsted action plan needs refining so that it indicates more clearly whether planned actions are providing the anticipated impact.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching in key stage 4 is more consistently effective than in key stage 3. One reason for this is that more subject specialists are assigned to key stage 4. In key stage 4, better teaching is leading to stronger progress, especially in Year 11. Work in books belonging to Year 11 pupils shows that they are building a secure body of knowledge, skills and understanding, which is preparing them well for external examinations. In key stage 4 classes, pupils are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge by completing tasks that are challenging, such as analysing complex speeches in texts and explaining the rationale for their ideas. Across classes in both key stages, some school-wide approaches are being effectively implemented. For example, in Year 7 science, pupils settled to learning quickly because, in line with school policy, they were provided with work when they entered the classroom. Teachers in both key stages are also now much clearer about the needs of disadvantaged pupils. They often target this group when questioning pupils about their learning.

In Year 8, teaching is noticeably weaker than in Years 9 and 7, where some, but not all, practice is stronger. For instance, pupils in Years 9 and Year 7 who are taught in the 'enterprise' and 'aspire' groups learn well. This is because teachers and assistants are fully aware of their needs and how best to meet them. They also ensure that the work they set is stimulating and accessible. In other classes in key stage 3, teachers do not use information from their assessment of pupils' progress well enough. Sometimes teachers are not aware enough of the extent of pupils' prior knowledge. The questions they ask pupils to check the depth of their learning are not always sufficiently probing. Pupils' work shows that some who have experienced weaker teaching are below the standard expected for their age and stage. Leaders recognise that these pupils will need to make rapid progress to reclaim lost ground. They have strong plans to improve the consistency of effective teaching in key stage 3 next academic year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Around school and in the playground there continues to be a calm and orderly atmosphere. Staff, including senior leaders, are highly visible during breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils say that they feel safe and that there is very little bullying. They identify improvements in behaviour as having a very beneficial effect on their overall experiences of school. Most parents who spoke to inspectors also praised improvements in behaviour. The number of exclusions is steadily declining as a result of the more positive culture. However, attendance figures remain stubbornly below national average, despite the extensive and relentless focus the school is placing on improving attendance. For example, leaders have altered the time at which the school day starts, have created special form groups for those who attend less regularly and have paid for some pupils' transport to school. There have been some individual pupils for whom these approaches have been successful but these tactics are not yet leading to a more widespread reduction in absence rates.

In classes where practice in teaching is effective, pupils are engaged, listen well and show respect, both to their teachers and to each other. For example, pupils in Year 7 were paying attention and working hard in science and, similarly, Year 9 pupils were contributing well to class discussions in history. Where practice is weaker, especially but not solely in Year 8, behaviour in class is less positive. For instance, sometimes pupils treat teachers with a lack of respect and talk when their teacher has asked them to pay attention. Some pupils currently in Year 10 who accessed 'enterprise' when in Year 9 have found the transition to key stage 4 a challenge. Leaders are working very closely with these Year 10 pupils to improve their attendance, attitudes to learning and behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Due to effective support for individual pupils and stronger teaching, outcomes for Year 11 pupils are continuing to improve. The school is making good use of trust-wide processes to ensure that pupils' responses to GCSE questions are assessed accurately. Pupils' results in mock tests indicate that many are set to reach their GCSE target grades this year. In 2017, pupils' GCSE and external examination results were better than in 2016. Leaders have well-founded reasons to be optimistic about GCSE results in 2018, which are set to improve further in many areas. Of note is the improvement in pupils' progress in the suite of subjects known as EBacc (science, languages, history and geography). Although progress for many pupils is improving, some disadvantaged Year 11 pupils are not making the rapid progress they will need to achieve higher GCSE grades, despite having the potential to do so.

In order to secure strong outcomes for Year 11, subject specialist teachers have been assigned to this year group, which is having a positive impact on Year 11 pupils' progress. However, leaders recognise that this approach has taken its toll on pupils' progress elsewhere in the school, especially in key stage 3. Progress is not yet being tracked systematically enough in subjects other than mathematics, science and English in key stage 3. Work in pupils' books shows that while progress is strong in some classes in key stage 3, it is too slow in others, especially in Year 8 classes. Across key stages 3 and 4, pupils' progress in science is weaker than in mathematics and English, although better than it has been.

Literacy support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is mostly effective and is assisting this group in making progress. However, for a number of pupils across the school, especially but not solely disadvantaged pupils, weak writing skills and limited vocabulary are impeding their progress.

External support

The school continues to benefit from support provided by the trust-wide 'system leaders', who work very well with senior leaders and with some teachers. The 'system lead' for safeguarding has provided useful guidance to the designated leader on a range of issues, such as implementing new guidance to protect pupils' data. Internal and external reviews have been particularly valuable because they have accurately detailed where improvements need to be made. For example, the recent review of mathematics, conducted by the subject expert from within the trust, has supported the new subject leader in planning necessary improvements. The most recent pupil premium review, undertaken by an external organisation, has provided insightful guidance.

Despite the trust supporting the school in its efforts to recruit new staff, recruitment remains an issue for the school. In addition, some less experienced middle leaders and senior leaders have not had sufficient opportunity to develop their practice further by visiting good or better schools.