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Ms Kim Donovan-Maddix
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Dear Ms Donovan-Maddix

Special measures monitoring inspection of Elutec

Following my visit with James Whiting, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 February 2019, 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 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 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 its 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 third monitoring inspection on 5 February 2019 to 6 February 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They visited lessons and after-school activities in all year groups and across the curriculum. Meetings were held throughout the visit with the principal. Inspectors also talked with the assistant principals, met with the chair of the interim board and held discussions with a senior representative from the local authority.

A panel of pupils from across the school met formally with inspectors, and the views of students were also garnered during ad-hoc conversations during the school day.

Context

At the time of the previous monitoring visit, the principal had only recently been appointed. Since then, two assistant principals have joined the senior team alongside the one remaining assistant principal. These two new post-holders are responsible for special educational needs provision and safeguarding, and for oversight of science and engineering.

As reported at the last monitoring visit, a significant proportion of the teaching staff left at the end of the summer term. All posts are currently occupied, although this does not mean that staffing is now stable. Since September 2018, some staff have joined, stayed a short time and then left to be replaced by others. Applications are currently being invited for two engineering teaching posts.

The interim board continues to take responsibility for all day-to-day governance issues. This has given stability to the school's management. There is no doubt that, since the last monitoring visit, leaders and managers have started to take some effective action. They want to do the best for their pupils. However, wider contextual and historic issues about the school remain unresolved. The huge accumulated financial debt is still present, and no decision has been taken about the school's future sponsorship or status. The current Year 10 cohort, which joined the school in September 2018, comprises only 33 pupils. Current interest in Year 10 places for September 2019 suggests a similar picture, at best. When the school was opened, it was projected that 150 pupils would be in each year group.

The impressive building and facilities are severely underutilised. This, alongside remaining weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the slow progress made in the first year after the school went into special measures, signals that much is still to be resolved before the school's next full inspection. This picture is reflected in the school's development plan which, while rightly showing where successes have been achieved, also shows the areas where considerably more work is required.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Inspectors have no doubt about the commitment shown by the new principal and her new senior team. Effective action has been taken for current pupils in a number of areas. Teaching and learning in English, particularly reading, has improved further, addressing one of the key areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection. Behaviour has continued to improve. Stronger strategic leadership is evident for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and for provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, work remains to be done to ensure that provision in both of these areas is of adequate quality. The principal has taken personal oversight of the pupil premium funding. She has also identified the need to build bridges with other local schools to increase numbers on roll and better serve pupils when they transfer to Elutec.

Safeguarding practices at the school continue to strengthen. Systems for record-keeping have been tightened by the introduction of a commercial online package. This is helping to better join-up different aspects of pupils' well-being, thus addressing a concern found at the previous monitoring visit. Inspectors found no significant concerns with the school building, although on two occasions staff did not follow guidance relating to pupils wearing eye-protection in practical sessions.

As reported at the previous monitoring visit, a significant proportion of staff moved on at the end of the 2018 summer term. The new principal is determined to appoint staff who can provide adequately for pupils. This has not been easy. While decisive action has been taken to eradicate the weakest teaching, the quality of teaching and learning is still not secure. This is particularly so in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The teaching of English in key stage 4, including reading and writing, continues to develop. Teaching seen during the inspection, in classrooms and through books, was effective. The learning environment in the English classroom is particularly stimulating. Pupils told inspectors that they received the best teaching in English. This is because of consistent expectations, continuity in staffing and, importantly, determined leadership. The commercial reading scheme has become established. Leaders showed inspectors evidence that pupils throughout Years 10 and 11 are regularly borrowing books from the reading room and are becoming habitual readers. Results from online tests suggest that the scheme is having a positive impact and raising pupils' reading ages. This is a clear improvement from the last monitoring visit. Some specialist books have been acquired, for example in science and engineering. However, inspectors are still of the view that the range of books in the reading room is not ambitious enough for the most able pupils. Neither do the books available give sufficient breadth or depth to pupils' wider cultural understanding and general knowledge. This is particularly important considering the

specialist, narrow nature of the UTC curriculum.

Elsewhere in the curriculum, too much teaching continues to be typified by lack of challenge or direction. Pupils who had experienced changes of staff since September told inspectors that teachers were unaware of previous work undertaken and had repeated tasks or 'started again'. This was seen in mathematics, where Year 10 pupils were set excessively simple calculations as a 'starter activity'. In engineering, resources downloaded from a social media site were used to occupy Year 10 pupils, without sufficient explanation or demonstration. Scrutiny of project files in engineering showed work that was incomplete and of poor quality. Inspectors were not able to see examples of pupils' completed practical projects and artefacts. In a science 'practical' lesson, too much time was spent organising the mechanics of group work and, again, lack of demonstration and explanation led to pupils being confused and disengaged. There are exceptions, and some science books scrutinised by inspectors were beautifully detailed and presented. When set practical tasks in engineering, Year 11 pupils demonstrated competency in manipulating hand tools. However, as in previous monitoring visits, the task lacked challenge, with missed opportunities for pupils to demonstrate creativity or independent thought.

Following the appointment of an experienced special educational needs co-ordinator as assistant principal, identification and recognition of pupils with SEND has improved. All pupils with identified needs are now given an 'SEN passport'. These tell staff very clearly what support and strategies are required. Very recent staff appointments have been made to offer additional nurture and booster groups for pupils with SEND. Those in most need are taught in smaller groups. However, day-to-day support through targeted resources and tailored activities in class are still the exception. This is also the case for the most able pupils, who are not routinely stretched.

Despite improved leadership in other areas of the school's work and continued improvements in English, the lack of a consistent and adequate quality of teaching and learning in STEM subjects remains a crucial impediment to securing a positive judgement at the next full inspection.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

During this visit, the principal and inspectors had detailed discussions about pupils' previous experiences before they joined the school in Year 10. Scrutiny of documentation, including information from their previous schools, confirmed that around half of the current Year 10 group experienced various behavioural and/or attendance difficulties when they were in key stage 3. Given this information, the sensible and mature behaviour exhibited by many pupils is commendable. In many classrooms observed during this visit, pupils were typically compliant and cooperative, even when teaching provided insufficient challenge. Pupils say that there are still occasions when a few pupils behave inappropriately, but this is the

exception rather than the rule. Typically, behaviour around the school is calm.

Since the previous monitoring visit, a programme of 'drop-down days' has been planned to provide pupils with religious education, and thus meets a condition of the school's funding agreement. Leaders have reviewed the school's programme for PSHE education. While still being delivered during daily tutor sessions, pupils reported that it is now taught more regularly. This is an improvement, as is the provision of age-appropriate sessions for subjects such as sexual health and relationships. However, sessions sampled during the visit indicated that more work is needed to ensure that staff have adequate resources for teaching PSHE education. For example, inspectors observed the same worksheet being used in tutor groups across the school, from Year 10 to Year 13, to facilitate discussion about healthy lifestyles. The quality of teaching was extremely varied and relied too heavily on teachers' personal experience, knowledge and understanding. The resource did not provide sufficient guidance for teaching. Consequently, learning was weak and, occasionally, pupils' behaviour deteriorated.

Currently, pupils' attendance is broadly in line with national figures. The school's records show that persistent absence has fallen, although it remains higher than the national average. Practice seen during the inspection suggested that teachers are taking registers with more accuracy.

Leadership of the sixth form is currently shared between the Year 12 and Year 13 tutors. There are 20 students in Year 12 and 28 students in Year 13. Some aspects of support and guidance for these students are strong. These include preparation for their next steps and arranging work experience placements. This is much appreciated by students.

Attendance at the 'after-school' sessions between 3pm and 4pm is now much better, in that the hour is now a mandatory part of the school day. All pupils are expected to attend. Activities on offer include cycling, board games, debating, film club and a mentoring programme. Visits have been undertaken to places such as the Houses of Parliament. 'Pupil voice' is well-established at Elutec, and leaders listen seriously to what pupils have to say, for example about changes to the school day. Pupils who spoke with inspectors, formally and informally, were articulate and gave convincing evidence for their arguments. They were knowledgeable about equalities and spoke intelligently about their continuing concerns with teaching.

The final hour of the school day is also used to deliver and test the reading recovery programme, and to provide additional sessions to support the engineering and science curriculum. While it is positive that all pupils are in school for this extended period, evidence from this visit showed that the use of this time is not as effective as it should be. Furthermore, the activities do not contribute sufficiently to pupils' wider spiritual or cultural development.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders spoke convincingly to inspectors about the difficulties in drawing conclusions about pupils' progress from published end-of-key stage 4 data. Inspectors agree that as such data includes the progress made by pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 in their previous schools, and it should be considered with care.

From scrutiny of records, inspectors also found that the majority of pupils in Year 10 had joined Elutec without any information about their academic achievement in key stage 3 being transferred from their previous schools. This was even the case for those pupils for whom behavioural and attendance records had been received. The lack of information about what pupils have studied in key stage 3, or the skills and knowledge that they have acquired in this time, makes it difficult to provide tailored or challenging work. It is important to stress that this is a joint responsibility between Elutec and the previous schools. At present, the lack of academic information transfer is not in pupils' interests. Not knowing the detail about pupils' recent learning history means that precious time is spent at the start of Year 10 testing and assessing pupils.

For all these reasons, inspectors agree that the impact of the school's work on pupils' outcomes is best judged by their progress solely during their time at Elutec rather than by using end of key stage 4 data. Evidence from pupils' books, files and in classrooms during this visit suggests that overall progress for 10 and 11 pupils remains weak. Inspectors accept that some pupils join in Year 10 having experienced difficulties in their secondary schools during key stage 3, with some catching up to do. However, there are others, including some most-able pupils, who joined Elutec because they were attracted to the offer of specialist provision for STEM subjects. These pupils still do not feel well served. They told inspectors repeatedly that the frequent changes of staff, particularly in science and engineering, mean that 'we study exactly the same topics because new teachers start all over again' and 'with the new teachers we learn the same things over and over'. They also say that there is still not enough practical workshop learning. Inspectors agree.

In the sixth form, notwithstanding the small numbers involved, the 2018 examination results showed improvement over those in 2017. Overall, data shows broadly average progress given their starting points when they joined Elutec sixth form. However, outcomes for students studying mathematics and further mathematics were noticeably stronger than those for students studying product design and engineering. This reflects the variations in teaching seen at the last monitoring visit. Destinations data for the 2018 Year 13 cohort show that around two thirds took up places at university, including one student at the University of Oxford. Others have taken up or have been offered employment or apprenticeships. The school's records show that all of the 2018 Year 11 cohort went on to further education or employment. Just over half went on to study Level 3 qualifications. However, only four of these 61 pupils chose to stay on to the Elutec sixth form.

External support

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has engaged more actively with the local authority. Both parties recognise that work is needed to ensure that pupils transferring from other secondary schools at the start of Year 10 come to Elutec with detailed records of their academic achievement so that their learning can continue with minimal delay. It is also clear that further support and expertise is required to support leaders in securing consistently acceptable teaching across the school.