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Mr Dan Steel
Principal
Bexleyheath Academy
Woolwich Road
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Dear Mr Steel

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bexleyheath Academy

Following my visit with Joanna Jones and David Davies, Ofsted Inspectors to your school on 24 and 25 April 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2018.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

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 governing body, 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 Bexley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Hallett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2018.

- Rapidly improve outcomes by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used to plan and meet pupils' needs, particularly the most able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
 - allocating the pupil premium funding effectively
 - ensuring that pupils who speak English as an additional language are given the support they need to access the curriculum and make progress.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - ensuring that all staff understand and follow the systems for managing behaviour
 - raising expectations of pupils and ensuring that staff address poor behaviour consistently.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum is appropriate and meets the needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that staff understand and follow the systems to improve the quality of education in the school
 - providing staff with the right levels of support and training they need to uphold the school's policies
 - ensuring that governors analyse information, especially about the pupil premium funding, in a timely manner so that they can hold leaders to account for the performance of all groups of pupils more effectively.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 24 to 25 April 2019

Evidence

Inspectors met with the principal, the executive director, senior and middle leaders and members of the teaching staff. Meetings were also held with the national director of secondary schools of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) and with the chair of the governing body. Inspectors visited classes across year groups and subjects to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. Many of these visits were made jointly with senior leaders.

Inspectors talked with pupils from all year groups to listen to their views of the school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at break and lunchtime and in classrooms, and visited internal seclusion rooms. Inspectors talked to four groups of pupils from a range of year groups.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the reviews commissioned by leaders and the action plans for governance, safeguarding and the provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records and information about pupils' attendance and behaviour. Inspectors also looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment across year groups, with a particular focus on disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Context

Since the previous inspection in November 2018, there have been changes to the senior team. The executive principal, who supported the principal for three days a week, has now left. A new executive director, who oversees five schools within the trust, has been appointed. The executive director is currently based full-time at Bexleyheath Academy.

There have been no further changes to the core senior team, which has been established since October 2018. Since the last inspection, 10 members of the teaching staff have left the school. Currently, there are teaching vacancies for September. These include vacancies for assistant principals, lead practitioners in English, mathematics, science and social sciences, as well as for a head of modern languages and other subject staff. Recruitment processes are under way to fill these vacancies.

There have been some changes to governance. Additional governors have been appointed and members of the governing body have dedicated roles and responsibilities so that they are better able to support the school than was previously the case.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders' work to improve the school is starting to have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and learning. The executive director and other members of the senior leadership team are highly visible around the school and pupils and staff value this. They have confidence in leaders and believe that they can improve the school successfully. Senior leaders act as role models in how they talk to pupils, build relationships and challenge pupils to do better.

Leaders have made some significant changes to raise expectations, instil ambition and start the journey of school improvement. For example, they have removed the tutor time and increased the duration of the classes to reduce movement around the school. These changes have been well planned and leaders have shared their purpose effectively with members of the school community, parents and carers. As a result, staff and pupils are fully supportive of the changes. Pupils enjoy starting their learning promptly.

Teachers, support staff and middle leaders say that staff morale is improving. They have found the training and feedback they receive from leaders on their teaching helpful and motivating. However, the high turnover of staff presents challenges for leaders. Leaders have not had enough time to make significant and sustained improvement to the quality of teaching and learning.

Since the previous inspection, reviews of governance and the pupil premium expenditure have taken place. Action has been taken to strengthen the governing body. Additional members have been appointed with specialist knowledge to support aspects of the school's work, such as safeguarding and the provision for pupils with SEND. The clerking of governors' meetings has improved so that key actions are clear. The pupil premium review will be discussed at the next governing body meeting in May 2019.

However, the challenge, support and leadership governors can provide are limited by the trust's governance model. Governance days, where governors visit the school prior to the formal meetings, although regular, are infrequent. Consequently, leaders make key decisions and changes without the scrutiny of governors. The chair of governors has recognised that a departure from the trust standard model is necessary and that additional governor scrutiny is required to support the school effectively. This request is currently being considered by AET.

As a result of the pupil premium review, a number of initiatives have been introduced to support disadvantaged pupils, including additional literacy and numeracy classes and Saturday classes. Disadvantaged pupils have had opportunities to develop their leadership skills and build their resilience and self-confidence. There has been an improvement in the attendance of and a reduction in exclusions of disadvantaged pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is variable, with inconsistencies across subjects and year groups. However, leaders have ensured that classroom routines are clear to pupils. Pupils know what is expected of them and are increasingly able to maintain concentration and focus. Teachers have higher expectations of pupils' level of engagement. Pupils say that teaching is improving but that it depends on the teachers they have.

Where teaching is effective, pupils are interested in learning and respond positively to high-quality resources and activities. For example, in a Year 9 music lesson, every pupil contributed on keyboards, guitar or drums to a performance of 'The Scientist' by Coldplay. Some teachers give pupils discussion opportunities and follow these up with probing questions so that pupils can deepen their learning. For example, pupils worked together effectively in mathematics to solve trigonometry problems.

Leaders have ensured that teachers have assessment information about the pupils in their classes and their particular learning needs. However, teachers do not use the information effectively to plan learning activities. Overall, teachers' pedagogical skills and understanding of how pupils learn are too low.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' actions to improve pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school are starting to have a positive impact. Leaders keep the behaviour policy under review and additional changes to the behaviour policy at the beginning of the summer term have been well received by pupils and staff. Pupils are generally focused on their learning in classes and are clear about the high expectations of their behaviour in class.

Almost all pupils who spoke to inspectors said that behaviour was improving, although all said that there was a lot more to be done. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 are more positive about improvements in behaviour than younger pupils. They say that there is less disruption to their classes. Most key stage 4 pupils are increasingly mature and sensible in the way that they interact with adults. The key stage 4 dining hall is pleasant and orderly. Pupils and staff say that this is typical.

Younger pupils' behaviour is improving more slowly than that of older pupils. Some younger pupils are sometimes openly defiant to adults. Younger boys, particularly, have not fully absorbed the new expectations. Some boys talked wistfully of previous times when they could do what they liked. However, overall, pupils said that the school was a worse place then and that it was better now.

The school's behaviour information supports the evidence that behaviour is improving. Fixed-term exclusions remain high but have fallen significantly from the

equivalent time period in 2017/18. The number of repeat exclusions is also falling.

Pupils' attendance, although below national figures, is improving. This is for all year groups and groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Pupils whose attendance has improved significantly feel well supported by the school. They identify that the improvements in pupils' behaviour enable them to feel more confident about coming to school. First-day absence calls to parents have been introduced. Senior leaders have made home visits to persistent absentees. As a result, persistent absence, although well above national figures, has dropped significantly and 90 pupils who were previously persistently absent have improved their attendance. The changes to the school day have helped pupils to improve their punctuality. Pupils say that their lessons are less disturbed by latecomers.

Outcomes for pupils

Assessments in English and mathematics, which are standardised across the trust, indicate that Year 11 pupils are making a little more progress than last year. The assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils are reaching higher levels of attainment in mathematics than in previous years. This is supported by inspection evidence from class visits and scrutiny of books in mathematics classes. However, these are small steps and leaders have a lot of work to do to ensure that all groups of pupils make strong progress across a wide range of subjects.

Pupils have weak literacy skills. Pupils' writing is poor across the school, particularly for boys. Boys' work is often poorly presented and incomplete. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to deepen their learning in science through practical work.

External support

Overall, AET provides effective support and challenge to school leaders. Curriculum leaders in core subjects value the support they get from trust staff. Teachers find the training by trust leaders helpful and say it is having a positive impact on their teaching. The central facilities of the trust, such as the human resources department, have also provided effective support to the school. However, the effectiveness of the governing body in scrutinising leaders' work and holding leaders to account is limited.