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Mr Michael Stoppard
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Stoppard

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Hereford Academy

Following my visit with Hugh Bishop, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 8 and 9 October 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 plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive

officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve urgently the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have consistently high aspirations for and expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - plan tasks that match closely pupils' needs and abilities so that tasks are not too easy or too difficult
 - consistently apply the school's behaviour and feedback policies
 - effectively check pupils' understanding in lessons
 - provide opportunities for the most able pupils to stretch and challenge their thinking and learning
 - provide tasks that engage pupils, deepen their learning and further their understanding, rather than simple tasks designed to keep pupils busy
 - improve provision, teaching and learning in the sixth form, even though this area is due to close after the summer term.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and the support from the trust so that there is rapid improvement in the achievement of all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils, by ensuring that:
 - leaders focus on the most urgent improvement strategies and evaluate their effectiveness and impact on raising standards across the school
 - all leaders routinely and systematically analyse information about pupils, especially groups of pupils, so that they can spot trends and patterns more quickly
 - teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are monitored and scrutinised more closely so that leaders are assured of the validity of information gathered and can intervene quickly to close any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - the additional funding the school receives has a positive impact on the outcomes of those groups of pupils it is intended for
 - there is a planned programme put into action for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Urgently improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring that all staff consistently apply the behaviour policy so that learning time is not wasted and all pupils feel safe at school.
- Reduce the amount of time some pupils miss from their education due to being

absent from school or internally isolated.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 October 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, several curriculum leaders and teachers. Inspectors also met with the chair of the local governing body (LGB), the national leader of education (NLE) supporting the school and the chair and CEO of the Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust.

Context

The headteacher joined the school on 1 June 2019. The school has had five headteachers in the past three years. Since the section 5 inspection, one assistant headteacher has left the school. Two associate assistant headteachers have joined the senior leadership team. Both are curriculum leaders in the school. The humanities faculty has been restructured into separate history, geography and religious education (RE) departments. Each has its own curriculum leader.

The school's sixth form closed at the end of the 2019 summer term, when its final intake of students completed their courses.

The section 5 inspection informed Ofsted's summary evaluation of the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust. Following the summary evaluation, the trust has been reconstituted. Several members of the trust board have left and have been replaced. A new chair has recently been appointed. The trust is now called the Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust (DHMAT). The Talentum Learning Trust is providing support for DHMAT.

DHMAT has completed a review of governance of the school. It is shortly to publish a revised scheme of delegation, setting out the responsibilities of the LGB and the trust board. The oversight of the school's post-Ofsted action plan is being carried out by the strategic task group (STG). This group comprises a member of the trust board, the CEO of DHMAT, the chair of the LGB, the headteacher and the NLE supporting the school, who is also the CEO of the Talentum Learning Trust.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

There has been improvement in many areas of the school since the section 5 inspection. Improvement has been particularly evident since the headteacher joined the school in June 2019.

Leaders have addressed the weaknesses in the school's curriculum. It now provides pupils with an appropriately broad range of subjects in all years. For example, in key stage 3, all pupils now study performing arts and there is more time devoted to

improving pupils' literacy skills. In key stage 4, pupils have a broad range of choices that complement a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science and physical education. From September 2020, key stage 3 will include Year 9, in addition to Years 7 and 8. Pupils will then study a wide range of subjects for their first three years in school, rather than the current two. In all years, pupils now study RE and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.

Leaders are at a very early stage of checking that the curriculum in each subject is well sequenced and organised so that pupils' knowledge builds effectively from year to year. Their focus to date has been on ensuring that consistent routines are followed in lessons, rather than on the content of what is being taught.

This monitoring inspection concentrated on the quality of education in English, mathematics, history and geography. In these subjects, leaders are reviewing the curriculum to ensure that pupils' knowledge is building from year to year and they are remembering more of what they have been taught. However, each of these subjects has suffered as a result of the turbulence within the school in recent years. Pupils, especially those in higher years, have gaps in their knowledge. Teaching is currently focusing on addressing these gaps. Teachers possess good subject knowledge. They explain ideas clearly and check that pupils understand what they are studying.

Leaders have recently introduced new assessment procedures throughout the school. It too soon to judge their effectiveness.

Leaders provide teachers with information about pupils with SEND. Teachers are aware of pupils' needs, and many seek to support them in lessons, but practice remains inconsistent across the school. Leaders are soon to provide teachers with more detailed information about how they might adapt their teaching to support individual pupils with SEND.

The outcomes achieved by pupils in Year 11 in 2019 were very weak. Provisional data published by the government indicates that pupils underachieved in almost all subjects.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development has improved considerably since the section 5 inspection, when provision was judged to be particularly poor. Leaders have put in place a comprehensive PSHE education programme in all years. In these lessons, pupils learn about British values such as democracy and the rule of law. Leaders have reorganised the school's pastoral system so that all pupils belong to one of four houses. This is beginning to encourage pupils' sense of belonging to the school. Weekly house assemblies complement the PSHE education programme and help pupils to reflect on issues such as equality and diversity.

Leaders are introducing opportunities for pupils to take on leadership

responsibilities. For example, prefects in Year 11 carry out duties at lunchtime. There is an increasing number of extra-curricular activities for pupils. Approximately a quarter of pupils take part at the moment. The school does not currently provide independent careers guidance for pupils. Leaders are aware of this issue and are seeking to address it as quickly as possible.

The area in which most improvement is evident since the section 5 inspection is pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Leaders and staff have worked hard to establish clear expectations and routines. They have been successful. Several members of staff and many pupils told inspectors how much better behaviour is now than it was last year.

In class, most pupils behave well. They are keen to learn and want to do well. At breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons, the school is calm and orderly. Pupils are courteous and polite. They move around the school promptly and sensibly. However, some lessons are affected by low-level disruption that interrupts learning. Some teachers do not deal with it as well as they should. Pupils in several years told inspectors they would like to see behaviour improve further.

During the section 5 inspection, pupils reported that they did not feel safe in school because of poor behaviour and bullying not being dealt with well. This aspect of the school has improved considerably. Almost all pupils who spoke with inspectors said they feel safe and happy in school. They said they trust staff to deal with bullying and other problems they might face. However, a very small number of pupils continue to believe that bullying is not dealt with well.

A small number of pupils now belong to a 'refocus group' in the school. These are pupils at risk of exclusion. They are taught away from their peers, with a high level of support from teachers and teaching assistants. The group's aim is to re-engage pupils with learning and, in due course, to reintroduce them to their classes. The pupils in the group are positive about the support they are receiving. Although it is too early to judge its impact fully, there are early indications that this provision is proving successful.

Attendance has improved this year, although there remains room for further improvement. Leaders have ensured that pupils' attendance is now recorded correctly. This was not the case at the time of the section 5 inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There exists now a clear and united sense of purpose that is shared by the trust board, governors and senior leaders. They are determined to end the turbulence that the school has endured in recent years. They are committed to improving the school so that it provides a good quality of education for its pupils and the local community.

The headteacher, well supported by DHMAT, has brought to the school a persuasive

vision and clear expectations of the education the school should provide. Staff appreciate this clarity. They are cautiously optimistic about the future.

Leaders have an accurate and realistic view of the school's weaknesses and what needs to be done for it to improve. The school's action plan is focused well on the school's most pressing priorities, although it places insufficient emphasis on continuing to reduce the low-level disruption of learning.

Leaders currently see improving the curriculum and improving teaching as two separate areas of work, with greater emphasis being placed on the latter. This is an unhelpful separation. To provide a good quality of education in each subject, the curriculum in that subject must be well organised and sequenced and it must be well taught. The quality of the curriculum and the quality of teaching are inextricably linked.

The reconstituted DHMAT is providing much-improved support for the school. Leaders and governors now appreciate the support they receive. This had not previously been the case. The STG provides effective support and challenge to leaders.

External support

External support is being focused well on the school's key improvement priorities. The Talentum Learning Trust is providing support for senior leaders, largely through its CEO. This support has contributed well to the early improvements seen in the school to date. The Talentum Learning Trust is also commissioning additional support for the school, focusing on developing more effective curriculum leadership. It is too soon to be able to comment on the effectiveness of this support.