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13 January 2020

Mr Paul Holroyd  
Principal  
Gloucester Academy  
Painswick Road  
Gloucester  
GL4 6RN

Dear Mr Holroyd

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Gloucester Academy**

Following my visit with Tracey Reynolds, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 17–18 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2018. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.**

- Leaders and managers drive rapid improvements in the standard of education in the school by ensuring that:
  - they quicken the pace of change
  - the impact of their plans, policies and practice is monitored effectively to ensure that outcomes for pupils improve
  - expectations are raised, so that pupils' progress is at least in line with national expectations
  - middle leaders have the skills to monitor the work of teachers so that teaching improves consistently
  - pupils develop a good understanding of British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum so that they are prepared well for life in modern Britain
  - pupils' attitudes to learning improve and episodes of misconduct are swiftly reduced.
  - attendance overall, and particularly of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, improves so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
  - teachers provide effective opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy within English and mathematics and across the wider curriculum
  - the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are provided with learning that is sufficiently challenging and deepens their thinking
  - pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils are provided with support that stretches their learning further so that they make good progress from their starting points.

An external review of the impact of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 December 2019 to 18 December 2019**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, the regional director and the chief executive officer of the trust. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and one other governor. Inspectors visited lessons, spoke with pupils, considered pupils' work, spoke with staff and scrutinised documents.

### **Context**

Gloucester Academy is part of The White Horse Federation (TWHF). This is a multi-academy trust that operates across Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Swindon. It is made up of five secondary schools, 25 primary schools and two special schools.

The school was inspected by Ofsted in April 2018 and placed in special measures. An interim principal was appointed soon after this inspection. He was supported by an external consultant in the spring term of 2019 and then an adviser from TWHF in the summer term. The interim principal left the school in July 2019.

A new principal took up his post in September 2019. At this time, a new regional director for TWHF began to work with the principal and senior leaders. In addition, an external consultant has been commissioned by TWHF to provide advice and coaching support for teachers.

In December 2018, at the previous monitoring inspection, the trust was about to launch a new local governing body. This has taken place. The local governing body was given responsibility to oversee most aspects of the school's work. The trust retains overall responsibility for the school.

The chair of the local governing body began his role in January 2019. He resigned in December 2019. A new chair of the local governing body was appointed two weeks before this inspection. Three new governors have been recruited to join the local governing body in January 2020.

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

Senior leaders are determined to develop a curriculum that raises the aspirations of pupils and provides them with the knowledge they need to succeed when they leave the school. Nevertheless, their vision for the curriculum is not well understood by staff across the school.

Senior leaders reviewed the curriculum structure last year and introduced changes to balance the academic and vocational options available to pupils in key stage 4.

Subject leaders have each produced a rationale for the curriculum in their areas of responsibility. However, the quality of curriculum planning in different subjects varies considerably across the school. As a result, teachers' planning varies considerably. This leads to large differences in pupils' ability to learn and remember the core knowledge required in each subject.

Some areas of the curriculum – geography, for example – are well planned and implemented by expert teachers. However, many lessons in other parts of the school are taught by non-specialist teachers. While these teachers are supported by their colleagues, their lack of specialist knowledge limits pupils' understanding.

The atmosphere in lessons is calm, but pupils are unsure of the concepts they are learning. Pupils are often not secure in the basic knowledge that underpins the lesson content. As a result, they are overloaded when new ideas are introduced. For example, in science, pupils struggle to understand the concept of oxidation and reduction because they have not mastered earlier ideas about ions.

Last year, senior leaders introduced a new system for assessing pupils' attainment. This system is now established across the school. Pupils understand the system and so they can speak about the academic targets they are hoping to achieve.

Strong leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is bringing about improvement in the support these pupils receive. The leader of this area has created a nurturing environment for pupils. Teaching assistants provide pupils with the necessary support and encouragement, but too many of these pupils still do not attend school regularly.

There is no coherent strategy for improving pupils' mathematical understanding across the school. Senior leaders have plans in place to develop this aspect of their vision for the curriculum, but this work has not yet started in earnest. Consequently, there is little coordination between subject teams on when and how to teach particular mathematical knowledge.

Over the last year, the school's strategy to improve pupils' literacy skills has not had the impact senior leaders had hoped for. Pupils' poor reading and writing still holds them back. Senior leaders have introduced new initiatives this year to encourage more pupils to read and to check the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation. However, several of these initiatives are recent. As a result of their continuing difficulties with reading and writing, many pupils are still not able to get the most out of their lessons.

Staff have expertise in helping pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school's efforts to reach out to the Czech community have had some success. For example, pupils from this community recently ran a successful cultural event.

Pupils are not succeeding in their GCSE examinations. In 2019, pupils attained lower grades in their GCSE courses than in the previous year. A much smaller proportion

of pupils than seen nationally attained a grade 5 in both English and mathematics GCSE. This leaves pupils in a weak position when they seek places in further education or training at the end of Year 11.

Senior leaders' strategy for improving behaviour was not effective last year. The rate of exclusions remained high, and incidents of poor conduct in lessons continued to disrupt learning. The new principal relaunched a behaviour system six weeks ago. He communicated his expectations clearly to staff and pupils. This has had a positive effect. Many staff and pupils say that this initiative has had a calming effect on the school. While calm, pupils are not enthusiastic about their learning, and pockets of disruptive behaviour remain.

Many pupils do not attend school regularly. A high proportion of pupils are persistently absent from school. Senior leaders continue with their efforts to improve rates of attendance for all groups of pupils. This work proved to be effective last year. Attendance improved. Since September, senior leaders have accelerated the increase in attendance. Even so, pupils' poor attendance remains a significant barrier to their learning. It undermines other efforts to improve the quality of education at the school, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

At the previous monitoring inspection, senior leaders had recently introduced a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Since then, they have evaluated its strengths and weaknesses and modified the programme. As a result, the curriculum is richer. It includes content carefully chosen to prepare pupils to face the risks that confront them in today's society.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The school improvement strategy lost momentum last year. Senior leaders found it difficult to replace experienced teachers who left the school. Middle leaders were not able to bring about the necessary improvements in pupils' knowledge in their areas of responsibility. Consequently, gaps in pupils' knowledge caused by previous underachievement remain.

The current senior leaders are realistic about the school's performance, but they are optimistic for the future. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Senior leaders have successfully stabilised pupils' behaviour in recent weeks. Pupils respect the principal. They recognise his determination to improve their school.

The local governing body has not fulfilled its role effectively over the last year. Governors are committed to the school. Even so, they have not held senior leaders to account successfully for its performance. They have not provided sufficient challenge and support for school leaders. For example, governors do not have a clear understanding of the strategy for using pupil premium funding. Over half of pupils are disadvantaged and so they are eligible for this additional funding. In the last three years, fewer and fewer of these pupils have achieved the success they are capable of.

The trust has had responsibility for this school since it was placed in special measures in April 2018. Weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum remain, and many aspects of the school's performance have declined in that time.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The new principal and senior leaders have brought calm to the school by taking a firm stand on the disruptive behaviour of a minority of pupils. Many teachers comment that pupils are now more respectful in lessons.
- Staff with direct responsibility for improving the rate of pupils' attendance are working well as a team. Senior leaders recognise the importance of this work. They are setting attendance as a suitably high priority.
- Pupils with SEND receive increasingly effective support. Leaders of this area of the school's work are determined and resilient in the face of many challenges.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Senior leaders believe that the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is fundamental to building pupils' self-esteem and achievement. However, their actions have not improved pupils' skills significantly.
- The large number of changes in leadership roles and other changes in staffing have had an unsettling effect on the school in the last year.
- The school's strategy for developing teachers' skills has not caused the rapid improvement necessary. Several advisers have come and gone in a short space of time. The strategy has lacked coherence and has been ineffective.

### **External support**

At the time of the first monitoring inspection, the trust had recently brokered packages of support with a number of local schools and with external consultants. This strategy was piecemeal, and so the effectiveness of this work was variable. Some staff found the number of initiatives overwhelming. Turbulence in staffing meant that sometimes teachers who had received training subsequently left the school. As a result, the external support provided for the school did not reap the benefits that were hoped for.