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Sarah Murcott
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Dear Mrs Murcott

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willenhall E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to your school on 26 January 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are not taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - curriculum implementation is further developed by focusing on building pupils' confidence and independence in their learning
 - pupils have the opportunity to discuss and engage with challenging texts in all subjects
 - high expectations and aspirations are in place in all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, GCSE options and destinations

- additional funding is used to best advantage and to the benefit of all pupils
- strengthen leadership capacity by ensuring that:
 - recently appointed leaders receive more targeted support to develop in their roles
 - trust leaders review governance arrangements so that leaders are held to account effectively for the impact of their work.

Context

COVID-19 has adversely affected pupil and staff absence since March 2020. At the time of this inspection, approximately 20% of teachers and 25% of pupils were absent from school due to COVID-19. Leaders have ensured that all classes have been covered by internal members of staff. Some classes have been doubled up to ensure that pupils' education is maintained as effectively as possible. Remote education approaches developed during the pandemic have been maintained so that any pupils who are absent from school can access learning materials remotely for missed lessons.

You took over as executive headteacher in April 2021, having provided support to the previous headteacher from September 2020. Since April 2021, the majority of the leadership team has changed. Staffing is now more stable. No supply teachers are employed in the school.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, leaders' actions and decisions have not ensured that the school has made consistent improvement towards becoming a good school. This is for a number of reasons. COVID-19 has affected the school's rate of improvement since March 2020. However, this does not account for the lack of progress made following the last inspection and prior to March 2020. Trust leaders did not provide effective support to the school immediately following the previous inspection. A significant number of changes in senior leadership have meant that there has been a lack of continuity in implementing school improvements. Consequently, leaders have not tackled the deep-rooted challenges the school has faced.

Since you took over as executive headteacher in April 2021, there are some early signs of improvement. Pupils' behaviour has improved. Pupils now have more positive attitudes to learning. In the lessons I visited, pupils were engaged and there was no disruption to learning. Pupils are keen to take on positions of responsibility, such as becoming pupil ambassadors. They help younger pupils to settle in school and work closely with the community, for example gathering donations for the local food bank. Pupils' attendance has been affected by the challenges of COVID-19, but you now have more rigorous processes in place to challenge poor attendance when appropriate.

Recent developments of the curriculum mean that the curriculum now meets the needs of most pupils more effectively. Lessons now follow a consistent pattern that helps pupils to

remember more of what they have learned. Teachers assess pupils' learning in lessons and respond promptly to address misconceptions. This is beginning to ensure that work is better matched to pupils' prior learning. In some lessons, however, teachers provide tasks that are too tightly structured. This means that some pupils are not sufficiently challenged.

You have raised the profile of reading across the school in recent months. Texts are now carefully chosen to appeal to pupils' interests. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to read challenging texts in subjects other than English. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to read and understand information by engaging in discussion. As a result, pupils do not develop independence in their learning.

Pupils say that, in the past, the frequent change of teachers did not help them learn. You took the decision not to employ supply teachers to cover for absent teachers. Pupils prefer to have lessons covered by staff they know. You have carefully managed teachers' workload when they are covering for absent colleagues. Teachers feel valued and well supported by senior leaders and subject leaders. Teachers now enjoy sharing their practice and talking about what works in lessons. There is an infectious excitement about learning and about the improvements that are being made. This is having a positive impact on the stability of staff. No teachers left the school at the end of the autumn term 2021.

Pupils know that teachers care about their education. The quality of careers guidance has improved since the last inspection. This is helping pupils to raise their aspirations about future career options. Pupils appreciate the extra time that teachers devote to after-school, weekend and holiday lessons to help them catch up with missed learning as a result of COVID-19. Despite this extra commitment, you make sure that teachers' workload is manageable.

You have started to rebuild relationships with parents and carers, and the wider community, which in the past have been fragile. This will take time, but you know that positive community relationships are key to the school's future success. You now send out two newsletters to parents every week and you hold regular drop-in sessions for parents and community members. This effort is starting to pay off. A much greater proportion of parents who responded to Ofsted's Parent View survey would recommend the school to others than was the case previously.

The recent changes to the curriculum and teaching have not yet had time to make a significant impact on pupils' achievement. There are still too many pupils leaving the school with low GCSE grades which do not enable them to go on to the most appropriate destinations for them, such as local sixth forms or university. Not enough pupils study English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects at GCSE. This limits pupils' aspirations and opportunities beyond school. However, you have identified the correct priorities to improve educational outcomes. You plan to encourage more pupils to study modern foreign languages and humanities subjects in future.

Trust leaders recognise that, in the past, mistakes were made in the support and challenge provided to previous leaders. They accept that insufficient progress has been made since the last inspection. However, trust leaders have made a renewed commitment to the school. They have every confidence in your expertise and the capacity of the new leadership team to bring about improved outcomes for pupils. Their confidence is well placed, based on the very recent improvements made so far. Leaders new to their posts are receiving support and guidance to develop in their roles. Support from the trust is now focused on building capacity within the school to drive improvement, developing existing staff who are committed to the school and its community.

Additional support

The trust's governance arrangements have not been robust enough to tackle underperformance in the past. Despite committing additional funds to the school, pupils' achievement has not improved because funds have not been targeted appropriately. Pupils have not achieved well because in the past leaders have not been held to account for the quality of education provided. Trust leaders know that this has to change. They also know that improvements have to be sustainable, which will take time.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and the regional educational director to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I also met with subject leaders, pupils, pupil ambassadors and early career teachers to discuss the curriculum and behaviour. I carried out lesson visits with the senior leader responsible for the curriculum. I reviewed documents on the school website and other documents shared with me in school, including minutes of the governing board meeting, school improvement plans and policies. I checked the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector