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Mrs Kirsty Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Willenhall E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with Bianka Zemke, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 December 2018, 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 fourth 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs). I would ask that I am informed of any decisions that may result in the appointment of NQTs before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the raising achievement board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2017

- Act with urgency to ensure that all pupils are safe at the school by:
  - addressing pupils' poor behaviour through insisting on their adherence to school expectations and gaining the full support of their parents
  - ensuring all staff implement the school's behaviour management policy consistently and effectively, and that this policy offers suitable sanctions and appropriate support and rewards to pupils
  - improving the attendance of pupils, including those in alternative provision, through analysing strategies which have been successful previously, intervening early and working more closely with parents
  - ensuring that pupils receive high-quality information in lessons, and through the pastoral system, that enables them to recognise, avoid and deal with potentially dangerous situations.
- Ensure that the extra funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well to raise their achievement rapidly.
- Improve the impact of leadership, including governance, by:
  - becoming more precise in setting and reviewing actions and using this information rigorously for further improvement
  - meeting the statutory duty to deliver careers education, information, advice and guidance, and ensure that those pupils who have currently missed out have additional opportunities to acquire this support
  - check that communication with parents and the publication of information on the website meets statutory requirements
  - ensuring that senior and middle leaders are fully accountable for the necessary and urgent improvements required in safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and achievement.
- Improve the quality of the 16 to 19 study programme by analysing and improving the assessment system and outcomes for learners following academic courses.
- Improve teaching at key stages 3 and 4 so that outcomes improve rapidly by:
  - embedding a coherent teaching strategy which is applied consistently throughout the school
  - ensuring teaching staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - setting pupils learning tasks which they understand, are suitably challenging, and that capture their attention so concentration does not diminish.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management might be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 December 2018

Evidence

The monitoring inspection took place without any notice to the school and initially focused on pupils' behaviour. Inspectors observed pupils' conduct around the school site and during lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils about behaviour and their perceptions of the school. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in key stage 3 and 4 lessons across a wide range of subjects. Inspectors also visited the school's innovation centre and the nurture base. Inspectors were accompanied by school leaders on some visits to lessons. Inspectors looked at pupils' work when they were in class.

Inspectors met with a range of school leaders, including a national senior adviser and other representatives from the trust that sponsors the school. A range of documents was evaluated, including leaders' action plans, their analysis of recent assessment information and information about behaviour and attendance.

Context

At the time of the monitoring inspection, the headteacher was absent from the school. A national senior adviser from the trust that sponsors the school has taken on the headteacher's duties. Two new assistant headteachers have joined the senior leadership team and they have clearly defined areas of responsibility that focus on specific strategic priorities. There has been some change in teaching staff since the previous monitoring inspection and only one post currently remains vacant.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders' processes to track the actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils have become more robust since the previous monitoring inspection. Leaders have thoroughly evaluated the impact of the additional funding used to support disadvantaged pupils last year. They are aware which actions were not effective in addressing differences in behaviour, attendance and outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Actions that have proved effective continue to be used. For example, the number of academic coaches used to support disadvantaged pupils' learning has increased to include foundation subjects. Discussions between senior and middle leaders now include a greater focus on how well disadvantaged pupils are doing. Discussions identify how the school's approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils can be deployed effectively in lessons.

School leaders responsible for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well by a system leader from the trust that sponsors the school. Together, they have developed a clear strategic plan that identifies ways to improve the quality and impact of learning experiences for pupils with SEND. Leaders have ensured that the individual support plans (ISPs) that

teachers use contain specific targets and strategies to help pupils learn. Leaders monitor how well staff respond to the needs of pupils with SEND, for example when visiting classrooms. Leaders make sure additional training and support is targeted on staff who require it.

Leaders contact parents promptly in response to any concerns raised about the school. Leaders consider and investigate such issues carefully and thoroughly. Subsequent actions are timely and proportionate to the concerns raised. Leaders make sure they inform parents of actions taken in response to their concerns. Should parents have further concerns, representatives from the trust check that school leaders have responded appropriately, checking that the relevant policies and procedures have been followed.

Leaders keep accurate information about the destinations of pupils who leave the school during the year. Records of leaders' actions detail the work they have done alongside the small number of parents who have elected to educate their children at home this year, to make sure such decisions are in the best interest of pupils. Links to other agencies, including the local authority, are established to share information when pupils move from the school's roll.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

When senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching they identify accurately strengths and where further improvement is necessary. They consider the impact of teaching on pupils. Leaders shape the feedback they prepare for teachers in response to the school's key strategic priorities when they observe lessons. As a result, there is a shared understanding around how leaders want to develop teaching in the future.

In lessons, positive relationships between pupils and adults contribute to a constructive learning environment. Occasionally, teachers do not respond promptly to low-level disruption which can disturb pupils' learning. Sometimes, teachers are too quick to support pupils with any learning problems they encounter. This reduces opportunities for pupils to develop problem-solving skills. It can also limit occasions for high-prior-attaining pupils to tackle more demanding tasks. Teachers generally assess well when pupils are ready to move on to different learning tasks. However, some teachers judge when pupils are ready to move on based on the tasks they have completed rather than ensuring their new learning is secure.

Teaching does not yet consistently take into account pupils' starting points, although teachers are now more aware of pupils' prior attainment. High-prior-attaining pupils do not routinely benefit from tasks that stretch their thinking. Sometimes, additional or different tasks designed for the most able pupils do not sufficiently consider how they could deepen these pupils' learning. As a result, teaching continues to have a less positive impact for pupils with high prior attainment than for pupils with other starting points.

There have been improvements in how well teachers consider the learning needs of pupils with SEND. Increasingly, teachers use the clear information contained within ISPs in their approaches. These strategies support pupils effectively to make progress in line with their peers. However, when teachers do not deploy suggested strategies, pupils with SEND are not able to access the learning as well as other pupils in their class, which limits the progress that they can make.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders continue to use robust procedures to address pupils' attendance. For example, leaders make sure checks on pupils' whereabouts on the first day of absence are completed promptly. These actions have resulted in improvements in overall rates of attendance since the last inspection. However, improvements are uneven across different year groups and for different groups of pupils. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is reducing but remains above the national average. For example, since last year, there has been a reduction in the proportion of pupils with SEND who are persistently absent from the school, but it remains higher than for other pupils at the school. Similarly, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains lower than that of other pupils at the school, although this is improving over time. Strong leadership of attendance remains focused on securing further improvements.

Pupils' conduct at social times and around the school continues to be positive. Pupils are polite and respond positively to instructions from adults who are supervising them. Occasionally, at break and lunchtime, inappropriate language was heard by inspectors, but this was usually addressed by staff. Pupils feel that staff apply the school's behaviour policy consistently, and they are clear about the consequences of their actions. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure around the school site.

The proportion of pupils who receive detentions for infringements of the school's code of conduct is still higher than leaders aim for but is declining over time. Boys are more likely to receive detentions than girls. The number and types of concerns about the behaviour of disadvantaged pupils continue to fall, particularly for more serious incidents. The school's isolation room is a calm learning environment. Here, pupils are engaged on appropriate learning with adequate supervision. Leaders' analysis of this facility shows it has a more limited effect on a small number of boys in Years 8 and 9 who are persistently placed there. However, leaders' current analysis does not show if the types of incidents that lead to the use of this facility are changing over time.

The number of fixed-term exclusions continues to decrease. Pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11 who are at risk of permanent exclusion are given the opportunity to attend the school's innovation centre. Here, they benefit from a constructive learning environment and high levels of staff support. The curriculum is structured to include a range of academic and vocational qualifications and work-related learning opportunities. These help pupils prepare well for the next steps in their education.

Pupils' attendance and behaviour improves sharply during their time in the innovation centre.

Outcomes for pupils

Actions taken since the inspection in March 2017 have resulted in improvements in overall rates of progress at the school, particularly for younger pupils. The decline seen in outcomes at the end of Year 11 last year has been reversed. However, outcomes for 2018, although not yet fully validated, remain low. For example, pupils made almost two thirds of a grade less progress on average than pupils nationally in 2018. The proportion of pupils who achieved a strong pass in both English and mathematics improved from 2017 to 2018 but remains below the national average.

Variation in progress for different groups of pupils and in different subjects remains. Although progress in humanities, science and foreign languages by the end of Year 11 improved this year, it was lower than in English and mathematics. High-prior-attaining pupils made three quarters of a grade less progress than similar pupils nationally which was comparable to the previous year. Rates of progress of pupils with other starting points were roughly half a grade less than for similar pupils nationally, but this was a marked improvement from the previous year.

Disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 made on average half a grade less progress than other pupils at the school this year. This was only a small improvement on the outcomes achieved the previous year. However, current cohorts of disadvantaged pupils are doing much better and differences between their progress and that of other pupils in the school have reduced rapidly. However, variations remain in progress for disadvantaged pupils with different levels of prior attainment. Disadvantaged pupils with high prior attainment make less progress than disadvantaged pupils with other starting points.

Outcomes for pupils with SEND were lower than for other pupils by the end of Year 11 in 2018. However, these differences are not present for current pupils. In fact, recent monitoring information suggests that pupils with SEND are making faster progress than their peers.

External support

The trust that sponsors the school continues to undertake a formal six-weekly review of how well the school is doing. This process includes a rigorous review of information that leaders collect about the school, and how they use this to identify strategic priorities and plan actions. The trust validates school leaders' work by checking the reliability and validity of the information collected and evaluating the effectiveness of actions. Trust leaders are well informed to make appropriate decisions about where best to target additional resources as a result. For example, a system leader from the trust works with school leaders responsible for pupils with SEND.

The trust and school leaders continue to monitor the progress that the school is making against the action plan that was produced following the last inspection. Where targets set early in this process have already been achieved, they are revised in order to continue to provide challenge for the school.