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Mr A Kirby
Headteacher
Mesty Croft Academy
St Luke's Road
Wednesbury
WS10 0QY

Dear Mr Kirby

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mesty Croft Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 October 2014, 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 which 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 which took place in June 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair and other members of the Board of Directors (the academy's governing body) and the School Improvement Partner. The directors' statement of action, that also incorporates the academy's action plan, was evaluated. The inspector also met with school senior and middle managers, and briefly visited seven lessons.

Context

Two teachers and one teaching assistant left the school at the end of the summer term. Three new teachers joined the school in September 2014, including two newly qualified teachers who had been appointed prior to the inspection in June 2014. The senior leadership has been reorganised, with the internal appointment of a new

assistant headteacher. A partnership has been established with Manor Primary Academy Teaching School in Wolverhampton. The academy contracts a local authority School Improvement Partner as a consultant.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The directors' statement of action predominantly refers to whole-school programmes aimed primarily at increasing the time and 'rigour' of monitoring, and more frequent pupil progress data collection. It does not explicitly address in enough detail the key issues for improvement from the previous inspection. Rather than a named leader, these global programmes have several people leading and evaluating their effectiveness, with a different evaluator. There is no action to address the inspection's finding that previous academy self-evaluation has been too generous. There is no specific strategy or training programme to develop teachers' understanding of the current attainment of their pupils, or to improve how that understanding can guide lesson planning to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. There is no clear action to ensure that the checks made by leaders on teaching will be rigorous, other than establishing a three-weekly pupil book scrutiny calendar.

The action plan success criteria are too vague, achievable simply by carrying out the action rather than confirming that the action has delivered a measurable improvement in performance. The pupil achievement milestones that are present do not allow directors to measure the rate of improvement over time, do not have the current 'starting point' specified, and take no account of the variable provision across stages or among groups of pupils. Not every stage is causing concern, or every group of learners. The plan is not recognisable as tailored to the actual improvement needs of Mesty Croft Academy.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium revealed serious shortfalls over time in the monitoring of impact, and delegation of funding, to meet the needs of eligible pupils. Monitoring paperwork was considered 'not fit for purpose'. As yet, the academy has not published its plans for the use of pupil premium for 2014/15. Concerns were rightly raised in the review about the use of this funding to employ special educational needs staff.

Another external review, this of governance, found that the board of directors 'appeared to lack the knowledge or confidence to provide effective strategic leadership to the senior leadership team'. There was no shared understanding of the strategic overview of the academy, with no update to the long-term plan since becoming an academy two years ago. To date, there has been no clear policy for the recruitment of new directors, although there is an ongoing skills audit taking place

that will help to resolve this in the future. The review noted the willingness of directors to work to resolve the failures noted by the previous inspection report, and directors affirmed to the inspector their intention to lead the academy out of special measures.

The board of directors has responded to one of the review recommendations by setting up a Monitoring Committee to steer the academy out of special measures. This group met for the first time on 30 September 2014. The minutes of that meeting note the new three-weekly monitoring policy has started. They also record other administrative actions, including the purchase of new pupil progress tracking software. There is no discussion recorded in relation to the resolution of the key inspection issues. There is no evaluative response by the board to the two reviews, despite the difficult messages they contained. Minutes of the board of directors from the inspection in June to date are preoccupied with trying to have the inspection itself challenged.

Despite these strategic weaknesses, good work has commenced within the academy. The link with Manor Academy provides access to professional development opportunities for staff, particularly newly qualified teachers. A programme of sharing good practice between teachers is improving the quality and consistency of marking and feedback to pupils. Some lessons provide pupils with alternative tasks that help address their various learning needs. In classrooms, therefore, changes are occurring for the better and there is sense of common purpose amongst leaders, managers and staff.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The academy directors' statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The academy's action plan is not 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 Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector