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26 June 2015

Andrew Kirby
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 24–25 June 2015, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell and as below.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Department of Education

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2014

- Ensure teaching enables all groups of pupils to make at least good, and where necessary very rapid progress, so that attainment is at least average in all year groups for reading, writing and mathematics by making sure teachers:
 - accurately identify the learning needs of individual pupils
 - match targets and learning activities to pupils' needs
 - ensure targets and activities are sufficiently challenging
 - show pupils clearly how well they are doing, give precise guidance on how they can improve and ensure pupils act upon the advice given.

- Close the gaps in attainment between pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - tracking the progress and attainment of all pupils precisely and focusing teaching on closing gaps
 - making comparisons between different groups in the academy and with pupils nationally so that all pupils achieve as well as they can
 - identifying pupils who are falling behind and taking immediate action to help them catch up
 - checking that all additional help given is having sufficient impact.

- Increase the impact of the academy's actions on reducing the absence rates of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs so that attendance for all groups of pupils is at least at the national level.

- Improve the impact of leaders at all levels upon the achievement of all groups of pupils by making sure that:
 - lessons in mathematics, writing and reading are sequenced in a way that systematically builds pupils' skills and understanding
 - performance targets for teachers reflect ambitious expectations for attainment and progress
 - teachers have the skills needed to understand and meet all pupils' learning needs in reading, writing and mathematics
 - checks on teaching are rigorous and use evidence from pupils' books and information from the academy's tracking system to make accurate judgements about its quality
 - leaders use these checks to give teachers specific guidance on how to improve pupils' learning and routinely check that teachers have followed this advice.

- Improve the effectiveness of the board of directors in ensuring that all groups of pupils achieve well by making sure that directors:
 - use information about pupils' achievement in the academy and nationally to build an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
 - know about the achievement of different groups of pupils, particularly those who are eligible for the pupil premium, more-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - challenge leaders rigorously where they identify possible underachievement
 - ensure that decisions about salary increases for all staff are linked to how well pupils achieve.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24–25 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Board of Directors, the School Improvement Partners contracted from the local authority, the leadership consultant, and the headteacher of Manor Primary School in Wolverhampton, which is providing professional development support to the school. Pupils' attendance and behaviour were not a focus of this inspection.

Context

The board of directors has reduced in size from 18 to 10 members. The previous Chair has left the board. A new Chair and Vice-Chair have led substantial reorganisation of the board of directors. Two new external independent consultants have been contracted, one as a School Improvement Partner from Sandwell local authority, and another experienced leadership consultant. The Department for Education is looking to broker a partnership with an experienced academy chain as a sponsor. New responsibilities have been assigned to teachers on the upper pay scale.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School leaders closely monitor the attainment and progress of pupils, with the help of experienced colleagues from Manor Primary School to make sure the judgements being made on standards are reliable. This evidence shows that most pupils, and most groups of pupils, are making reasonable academic progress from their starting points at the beginning of the academic year. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' progress is good, and there are strengths in Year 3 and 4 writing. In Years 1 and 2, progress is not as strong, with a noticeable gap between pupils eligible for the pupil premium and others in writing. Overall attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is improving steadily. In all years and subjects, the gap in attainment between those eligible for the pupil premium and others is stable or closing. This gap, however, in Year 6 is still too large.

The quality of teaching

Two good features of teaching are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are providing 'challenge' tasks at increasing levels of difficulty in English and mathematics lessons, topped off by a 'stinker', which is a particularly difficult activity. Pupils have some choice as to what task to choose, and they relish this approach. Year 5 pupils readily said that they enjoyed school much more now compared with when they were in Year 4, in part because the work was 'harder', 'interesting' and 'did not repeat' what they could already do. Equally important is the

better quality of marking and feedback to pupils. This directs pupils to specific actions that take their learning further, and expects them to respond. That response, in some cases, is particularly revealing in how well it shows pupils are thinking about the demands of a task, and what they need to do to improve. The impact of these two features is strongest in the older year groups and, for these classes, provides a built-in strategy to challenge all groups of learners. For the younger classes, there remains a sense of uniformity about some lessons and activities that pupils are being asked to do that limits individual pupils' progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Not inspected at this visit.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

In response to my previous visit, the board of directors convened an emergency general meeting that was attended by every governor. This led to a change of leadership of the board of directors, and of its operating structure. An immediate action was the commissioning of, and subsequent advice from, the external leadership partner and local authority consultant. This has led to substantive changes to the responsibilities of middle leaders and experienced school staff. Directors visited the school specifically to observe different aspects of its operations, then reported back to the board, with challenging questions for the professional staff. This recent and welcome engagement with the school, coupled with the directors' clearer focus on challenge and improvement, has not been in place long enough to show in better pupil outcomes but is a significant step in the right direction.

The deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have continued to successfully implement improvements in day-to-day teaching. They have a firm grip on pupil performance data and its analysis, which they use to adjust support and intervention for pupils and staff. School staff now know what they are expected to do, and what they are to lead. There is a palpable sense of confidence among staff that the school has begun to respond effectively to the areas for improvement required by Ofsted.

External support

Professional development for classroom teachers and middle managers from the Manor Primary School are helping to raise teaching quality. The local authority has been invited by the academy to provide improvement support for the headteacher through a new School Improvement Partner. Manor Primary School has brokered the arrangement for a leadership consultant. Both arrangements are helping the school's senior staff to drive change and improvement. Discussions with the Department for Education on the medium-term strategic oversight of the school are on-going.