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Mrs Zoe Bidmead
Principal
Melior Community Academy
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Dear Mrs Bidmead

Special measures monitoring inspection of Melior Community Academy

Following my visit with Mark Wilson, Ofsted Inspector, and Jeremy Haigh, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 November, 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 November 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I 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 Education Advisory Board and the sponsor.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables students to reach higher standards and achieve well, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of students
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve
 - require students to act upon the advice given in marking to improve their progress and attitudes to learning
 - check carefully students' understanding of what they are learning by asking searching questions
 - swiftly review students' work, especially that of boys, during lessons to make sure they are engaged with the tasks set and that they are making good progress
 - improve, check and modify, when necessary, students' attitudes to learning
 - support the development of English and mathematical skills in all subjects.

- Urgently improve the impact of leadership, management and governance by acting swiftly to ensure:
 - that leaders at all levels, including governors, relentlessly focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning to eradicate that which presently requires improvement or is inadequate
 - that all subject leaders provide accurate assessment information to senior leaders and governors so that underachieving students can be identified swiftly and appropriate actions taken to improve their learning
 - that all subject leaders make sure that academy policies are carried out effectively to ensure greater consistency in the quality of marking and teaching
 - rigorous checking of the impact of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all students
 - that reading and writing skills are developed strongly in all year groups across the whole of the school's curriculum
 - that pupil premium funding is used effectively to overcome barriers to developing higher standards and better achievement
 - governors and the sponsor have robust systems to check the accuracy and validity of information they receive in order to hold the academy to account.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, the regional director of the School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), members of the Education Advisory Board (EAB), members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, a group of staff and a group of pupils. The inspectors observed 19 part lessons, six of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. An inspector and a senior leader conducted brief visits to four further lessons and carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work.

Context

The senior leadership team has been restructured and a new vice principal appointed who will start in January 2016. Two Teach First participants joined the school in September 2015. The assistant principal with responsibility for the quality of teaching has been appointed as a specialist leader of education (SLE) in partnership with the local teaching school alliance.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes are improving. In 2015, attainment improved and a greater proportion of Year 11 pupils gained five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Attainment and progress in English showed strong improvement but, in mathematics, they fell slightly. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five good grades including English and mathematics and making the expected progress is still too low and below the government's floor standards; the floor standards are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs did not make good progress from their starting points in mathematics. Attainment and progress in science, history and design technology were too low.

The attainment of disadvantaged pupils in 2015 improved. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils gaining five GCSEs grade A* to C including English and mathematics was almost double that in 2014. The improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils demonstrates the impact of the extra help they have received, paid for by additional funding.

The progress of pupils is carefully tracked. Tracking systems are now much more robust and the data are accurate. The assistant principal with responsibility for pupil progress monitors those who are underachieving and identifies a range of pastoral and academic support to help them make better progress. Regular meetings about these pupils, with progress leaders and the inclusion team, enable consideration of the 'whole child', including their attendance and behaviour. It is too soon to see the

impact of these improved tracking and intervention systems. However, extra guidance to boost reading ages across the academy is having a positive impact.

Middle leaders and classroom teachers are engaged more effectively in monitoring the progress of pupils. Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account for progress in their departments. Teachers produce a profile for each of their classes which identifies pupils who are underachieving and the support teachers will provide to address underachievement. Plans are in place for middle leaders to use the class profiles to hold teachers to account. These changes are new and it is too soon to see the impact of them.

As a result of more effective tracking, senior leaders have a good understanding of the progress and attainment across the academy. The academy's progress information suggests that the current Year 11 are on track to meet the government's floor standards when they take their GCSE examinations in 2016. Progress in English is in line with national averages in the current Year 11, but progress in mathematics is still too low. Better progress in English than mathematics is replicated in other year groups.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. However, turbulence in staffing provides a major barrier to the impact of leaders in ensuring the consistency of the quality of teaching. The assistant principal who leads the work on the quality of teaching knows very well where the strengths and weaknesses lie and what needs to be done to improve teaching further. Effective training and packages of support have a positive impact on teaching, learning and assessment.

During the inspection, strengths in planning to meet the learning needs of pupils were seen in some lessons, for example in English and science. However, the picture is mixed. In some lessons, there is too much focus on the activities pupils are completing rather than the learning and skills which they need to develop. The expectations of some teachers of the difficulty and quantity of work their pupils can complete are still too low. In lessons where activities are not pitched at an appropriate level or do not interest the pupils, there is lack of engagement, leading to low-level disruption from both boys and girls.

Assessment, although inconsistent, is improving as a result of better questioning and more comprehensive marking and feedback. Where questioning is effective, pupils make better progress because teachers demand extended explanations which develop pupils' understanding and reveal where further teaching is needed. Improved marking and feedback is impacting well on pupils' progress. As a result of teachers following the academy's marking policy more consistently, pupils are responding to feedback by correcting their work. This is helping to develop pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, not all teachers are making good use

of this opportunity and pupils are not responding to their feedback. Training for additional adults is impacting positively on their knowledge and skills; as a result, they are contributing to marking and feedback in the classroom and helping pupils to know how to improve their work.

The development of reading and English is evident across the school. Bespoke packages are used effectively to have an impact on pupils' reading. There is a new library with a good range of books and pupils are encouraged to read in English lessons. Writing and literacy is being encouraged through work in geography and history lessons and mathematics is developed through science teaching. There is still work to be done in improving the quality and quantity of pupils' writing.

Insufficient information is provided to teachers working with disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs. Although the guidance for staff is being updated, teachers are not always clear about the best approaches to promote the learning of these pupils. As a result, disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs are not always making good progress from their starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils say that behaviour has improved in the academy. They value the new house system which gives them a sense of belonging and healthy competition between the houses. They enjoy house events such as 'the Melior bake off' and the rewards for good manners and respectful behaviour. New 'eco prefects' are working with the Principal to improve the environment in the academy. Consequently, the values, beliefs and attitudes in the academy have improved.

The vast majority of pupils say they feel safe in the academy and bullying is not an issue. Both staff and pupils recognise the impact of the new behaviour policy in the better attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons. However, when teachers do not use the behaviour policy consistently, pupils' behaviour deteriorates.

The academy tracks attendance rigorously. New procedures are starting to have an impact and there is a small improvement in attendance, particularly at Key Stage 3. Attendance of disadvantaged pupils is lower than that of their peers, particularly in Year 11.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal provides visionary and enthusiastic leadership for the academy. Following the restructure of the senior leadership team, senior leaders are providing effective strategic leadership in their areas. As a result, the quality of teaching, pupils' outcomes and the personal development and welfare of pupils have improved.

Middle leadership is developing. Middle leaders have received training in the new quality assurance systems and have a comprehensive planner, designed by the Principal, which lays out the monitoring and evaluation expectations for the year. The middle leaders are improving their understanding of progress information and its use in identifying underachievement. There are sophisticated procedures in place to check the impact of middle leaders on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching, including marking and feedback. The high expectations of senior leaders are clear, but it is too soon to see the impact of the new systems.

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils much better because it has been reshaped following a review of provision and the current requirements from the government. The majority of pupils are following courses leading to the English Baccalaureate at Key Stage 4. More pupils are studying modern foreign languages with the introduction of Spanish. An ethics and philosophy course is taught throughout the academy. This ensures the development of British values, as well as personal, social and health education. It is too soon to see the impact of the improved curriculum on outcomes. Effective careers guidance and progression routes to further education have resulted in the vast majority of pupils leaving the academy to go on to appropriate education and training.

Following the review of governance, the EAB members have written an action plan to address the areas identified for improvement. The Principal has provided members with an annual planner which gives detailed guidance to enhance their role in monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, the rigour of the challenge and impact of board members is beginning to improve. This is evidenced in some of the reports, which record the outcomes of visits made to the school, and in the challenging questions in the minutes of the EAB. Members are involved in collecting first-hand evidence of the work of the academy through discussions with middle and senior leaders and scrutiny of pupils' work. Questions posed at meetings demonstrate that the EAB are rigorous in checking the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes at Key Stage 4. However, there is no evidence of outcomes being monitored at Key Stage 3. The vice chair of the EAB has increased the level of challenge from the board through attendance at weekly senior leadership team meetings. Consequently, he is ensuring the accuracy and validity of information that the EAB receives in order to hold the academy to account.

External support

The Principal uses her contacts effectively to broker support. For example, the Principal of a local academy is supporting the Principal of Melior Community Academy with self-evaluation and providing training for middle leaders in their use of assessment information. As a result, leadership is improving at all levels. The Principal has developed links with the local authority which is involved in the current reviews of pupil premium and the provision for pupils with special educational needs. A representative of the local authority provides helpful quality assurance of improvements in the quality of teaching and has trained middle leaders in working

with disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved.

The regional director of SPTA visits the academy regularly and attends EAB meetings. As a result, she knows the strengths and weaknesses of the academy well and provides challenge and support to the Principal. The executive leadership of SPTA is rigorous in its challenge to the Principal about all aspects of academy life. SPTA have brokered the support of a consultant who has had a positive impact on the curriculum and the quality of teaching in design technology. Consultant support for English, from the sponsor, has resulted in improving outcomes in English. Although the academy is now receiving consultant support for mathematics from the sponsor, this was not provided in a timely manner to address staffing issues and weak teaching last academic year. As a result, progress in mathematics lags behind that of English across the academy.