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Mr Mohsen Ojja
Principal
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Dear Mr Ojja

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Crest Academy

Following my visit with Tomris Ibrahim and Rosemarie McCarthy, Ofsted Inspectors, and Helen Matthews, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 March 2016, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2015. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that newly qualified teachers should only be appointed to curriculum areas where strong support for professional development can be assured and following discussion with Her Majesty's Inspectorate.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the director for education at E-ACT, the Education Funding Agency and the director of children's services for the London Borough of Brent. This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Victoria Linsley
Seconded Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching and so raise students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, across key stage 3 and in the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what both boys and girls can achieve
 - teachers bring more precision to their lesson planning to meet students' differing learning needs and abilities
 - teachers' skills in checking students' learning during lessons and adjusting their teaching accordingly are improved
 - teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge and skills are developed to support subject and English language learning for the many students who are learning to speak English as an additional language
 - teachers consistently provide students with effective guidance about how to improve their work and that students are supported to respond to teachers' written feedback.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - developing the knowledge and skills of all middle leaders to improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of monitoring students' achievement
 - developing and implementing a whole-school approach to promoting literacy, reading and numeracy
 - evaluating the current arrangements for boys' and girls' teaching and use of school facilities at key stages 3 and 4 to maximise curriculum breadth, and to ensure opportunities for social interaction and equality of opportunity are promoted fully
 - developing the roles of local governors to form an effective local governing body that is able to support and challenge school leaders to secure the necessary improvements.

The planned external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 March 2016

Evidence

During the visit, inspectors held meetings with the principal, the chair of the raising achievement board, who is also the director of education for the sponsor, the system leader, senior and middle leaders, staff and pupils. Inspectors visited a number of lessons, the majority jointly observed with the school's leaders. One assembly and form periods for a range of year groups were observed and pupils were spoken to both formally in groups and informally during break and lunchtimes. A range of documents provided by school leaders were analysed. These included: the single central record (showing the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils), information on the progress of current pupils, parent responses to a survey conducted by the school, learning and teaching documents, minutes of meetings from the raising achievement board and reports by the system leader.

Context

Since the full inspection in January 2015 the school has undergone significant staffing changes. At the last monitoring inspection there were 29 new teachers and some vacancies filled with supply staff. The stability of staffing has improved and the school will be fully staffed after Easter. The integration of the boys and girls, still in its first term at the last visit, is now well established and the transition to co-education appears seamless.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal has a clear vision and strategy to move the school forward. He is well supported by a group of capable leaders. As a result, the systems and processes, for example the 'Crest Essentials' which set out expectations for pupils and staff, have been established and are now becoming embedded.

There has been good progress in developing the systems that inform leaders about how well pupils are achieving, and greater ability to direct Year 11 support as a result. However, staff use of the information is not consistent. There is more work needed to ensure that all staff are aware of, and can use, the information that is now in place.

There is clear evidence of improvement in the sixth form. Students are positive about improvements in the quality of teaching and the range of opportunities for support with careers and university choices. The leadership has been proactive about seeking support and expertise from local schools, particularly in science, where they have identified weaknesses. Leaders are clear about the subjects where there is the best teaching and those which require additional support and focus.

The principal has a good understanding of the challenges which remain. These include achieving consistently high-quality teaching and learning, developing the roles of middle leaders and tackling the challenges presented by high pupil mobility. In response, the school is committed to developing staff expertise. It is running an

internal 'improving teachers' programme, supporting middle and senior leaders with external courses and using robust systems to check the quality of lesson planning. The school has invested in a well-being programme to support the retention and high performance of staff.

There have been significant changes to the governance of the school since the last monitoring visit. The raising achievement board has replaced the local governing body. It meets every six weeks and is focused on looking at data, challenging the school about progress in key areas and visiting lessons to check aspects of the school's work. The director of education for E-ACT is currently chairing the board and there is clearly a high degree of scrutiny, challenge and support from this group.

The sponsor has recruited a very experienced system leader to work as a 'critical friend'. Weekly visits, which report findings and action points, ensure that the sponsor has an accurate understanding of the school's current position.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. New staff have been checked in line with current statutory requirements and the system leader also carries out spot checks on the single central record.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The school has clear systems to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, such as through 'typicality walks' and lesson observations. The former focus on lesson 'breakthrough' strategies which have a different strand every two to three weeks, for example how best to start a lesson or effective strategies with boys. This is having a positive impact on what goes on in lessons.

Higher expectations in all lessons include a green 'challenge' box and a red 'EAL' (English as an additional language) box on every PowerPoint to support key groups of pupils; these were evident in the lessons seen and are leading to greater precision in teaching. The school has evaluated teachers' use of these techniques and found them to be particularly strong in English, languages and religious studies. This level of analysis supports the school's drive for consistently high-quality teaching in the classroom.

There was broad agreement with school leaders who took part in joint observations about the quality of learning during the inspection. The school's routine observations suggest most teaching is good or better. There are robust procedures to support the drive for good and better teaching and to tackle poor performance such as a three-week teacher development programme.

The achievement centre provides teaching and support for pupils who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs. A specialist English as an additional language teacher is providing effective teaching to pupils with very little English in Year 7. The school rightly recognises that sharing this expertise is a priority if there is to be consistency in the achievement centre and to ensure that pupils thrive when they move into mainstream classes. A permanent special

educational needs coordinator will join the staff after Easter, providing extra capacity in this area.

Changes in the sixth form have brought about a greater focus on developing students' thinking skills and challenging questions. Where teaching is more effective, teachers use skilful questioning to develop students' ideas. Consequently, students make better progress.

The school is aware of the need for greater progress in mathematics. There was little evidence of problem solving or mathematics mastery at key stage 3, either in the pupils' books or in the teaching observed. However, there is a clear strategy for improvement in mathematics and a new subject leader will take up that post in the summer term.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

There was positive behaviour and attitudes to learning in many of the lessons seen during the inspection. It is clear that pupils understand the expectations. Staff welcome the clarity about non-negotiable conduct and systems for following up poor behaviour and find them to be effective. New staff interviewed feel that behaviour has improved since September 2015.

Similarly, pupils spoke positively about improvements in behaviour and linked that to the integration of boys and girls which they felt had led to 'everyone working together'. Pupils reported that they feel safe and are listened to by adults at the school. They are knowledgeable about current issues such as avoiding gangs and crime, through the 'drop down' days the school has run.

There is still work to do to improve pupils' behaviour between lessons, particularly that of the older boys, who need a degree of encouragement from adults to get to classes swiftly at lesson change over. However, it is important to acknowledge the significant improvement in behaviour since the school was placed in special measures.

The school has improved pupils' attendance in comparison with the same point last year. It is now very close to the national average. This is a significant improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's internal monitoring of pupils' progress at key stage 4 is much more stringent. The school is using mock examination papers in mathematics which are externally set and marked in order to improve their accuracy in predicting examination results. It also has contact with a local school for English moderation. Current information indicates that the rate of pupils' progress in both mathematics and English at key stage 4 is on track to increase. Information provided by the school indicates that the proportion of pupils who are predicted to achieve five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, will increase although it will remain below the current national benchmark.

The school's internal information indicates that students in the sixth form are making better progress. However, the legacy of poor teaching and inappropriate course choices for some students means that attainment is predicted to be low for A level courses.

Pupils' progress through key stage 3 is tracked using information from assessments showing their levels of attainment on entry as a baseline. The school's most recent assessments of pupils' attainment shows that from their previous starting points, about half are making at least the expected rate of progress. The school is aware of the need to improve pupils' progress at key stage 3. Plans are in place to reallocate the strongest key stage 4 and sixth form teachers once their examination classes have finished.

External support

E-ACT responded to the principal's wish to have greater support by providing a system leader which is clearly now a very effective resource for the school. In addition, the sponsor's role in the raising achievement board is key to continued improvement towards the removal of special measures. The sponsor has enlisted the support of a marketing company to work with the school to promote the school in the local community.