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11 July 2016

Mr M Farmer
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Dear Mr Farmer

Special measures monitoring inspection of Queen Elizabeth Humanities College

Following my visit to your school on 27 and 28 June 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2015.

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.

The statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. This is subject to consultation with me regarding the department involved, and the support available from Wigmore Teaching School Alliance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. 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 October 2015.

- Urgently increase the impact of leadership and management at all levels to secure rapid and sustained improvements in pupil outcomes by:
 - ensuring governors receive training so that they have the necessary skills to challenge leaders and hold them to account for the performance of the academy
 - setting clear targets in improvement planning so that the success of leaders' actions can be measured in terms of their impact on outcomes for pupils
 - continuing to review and refine the deployment and monitoring of pupil premium funding so that it is used effectively to close the gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others
 - monitoring rigorously the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, including that of different groups of pupils in all year groups, so that underachievement is identified and arrested swiftly
 - strengthening the skills and abilities of middle leaders in monitoring pupils' progress in their areas and in checking the work of their teams
 - ensuring that information on pupils' attainment and progress is accurate in all subjects
 - making sure that all staff have read and are fully conversant with statutory guidance to keep children safe
 - drawing on leadership support from good and outstanding schools in order to build leadership capacity.

- Improve teaching so that the progress of all pupils, and all groups of pupils, continues to accelerate by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - planning lessons and setting activities that take into account the prior knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils and enthuse them to do well
 - ensuring that all teachers have the confidence and skills to respond to how well pupils are learning and adapt their lessons accordingly
 - ensuring that pupils act on teachers' feedback to improve their learning and work
 - sharing best practice in the academy so that all teaching matches that of the best.

- Urgently improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - raising the achievement of all pupils and groups of pupils, including that of disadvantaged pupils and the most able

- ensuring that pupils achieve well in all subjects, and by reducing gaps in pupils' attainment and progress between subjects.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 June 2016

Evidence

I observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects across key stage 3. No key stage 4 learning was observed because Year 10 pupils were undertaking work experience and Year 11 pupils had completed their studies at the time of the monitoring inspection. During these observations, I looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. The behaviour of pupils was observed at break, in lessons and as they moved around the site.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, school leaders, teachers and members of the governing body, including the chair, and an external consultant who advises and contributes to managing the performance of the headteacher. A telephone conversation was held with the governors' appointed school improvement partner. Views of parents were considered from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's analysis of current pupils' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance. Additional documentation was evaluated, for example information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, minutes of governors' meetings, the school's procedures to ensure pupils are kept safe and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. The statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have seconded a member of staff to the senior leadership team and appointed more middle leaders in addition to those who took up their posts in September 2015. You have clarified the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders following these appointments. The governing body has been considerably expanded with the appointment of eight governors. Governance sub-committees have been restructured, including the creation of an Evidence Review Committee (ERC). This committee is monitoring and evaluating the progress the school is making regarding the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. A very small number of teachers are due to leave the school at the end of the academic year, and there is only one teaching post vacant. The school aims to have a fully permanent staffing structure in place as soon as possible and the recruitment process is underway to achieve this.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's leadership has acted quickly to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Expectations have been raised across the school and there is clear ambition and determination in all staff to improve the school's performance quickly and sustainably. Senior leadership has been strengthened by an additional appointment and by external support. There is clarity

and a sense of direction amongst senior leaders, which has been effectively communicated to and is supported by school staff. Parents remain supportive of the work that the leaders and teachers do. Senior leaders have put in place systems and interventions to monitor progress. They have created robust systems for checking and evaluating their impact. Middle leaders' knowledge and skills are developing rapidly through coaching and support from senior leaders and the external support that they receive.

Leaders have taken action to make sure that the reliability of assessments has improved. This has included ensuring progress information is matched to the work pupils produce in class. Middle leaders have also established comprehensive systems to externally moderate marking of key assessments, arranged with other schools where links have been established. As a result, monitoring information regarding the progress of pupils is now subject to many more checks than before, so has become more consistent. Leaders are anticipating that results in GCSE examinations this summer will demonstrate the improved accuracy of the information that they now collect.

As a result of changes to the school's monitoring processes, leaders are now better able to identify accurately where there are gaps in the progress of certain groups of pupils, such as boys, and act to address this. Regular meetings of line managers ensure middle leaders analyse progress information and take appropriate actions.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. This knowledge is gained through their extensive and well-planned monitoring activities including observations and evaluation of pupils' work. Increasingly, middle leaders are involved in monitoring, and so take responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning. Variation in the application of some school teaching policies and expectations has been identified by leaders and improvement in consistency is a key priority. However, comprehensive termly analysis of the meticulous monitoring information collected about the quality of teaching does not currently take place. As a result, leaders are not currently evaluating the impact of specific actions to improve teaching as sharply as they could. Further rigour in evaluating the impact of teaching and learning is planned, including formal reviews of performance of the different faculties in the school.

Governor training has taken place, which has successfully addressed some of the gaps in governors' skills, such as developing governors' understanding of the use of data. The recruitment of several new members of the governing body, including those who are experienced and have a broad range of appropriate knowledge, has increased the range of skills available. As a result, governors now ask challenging questions of school leaders, verify the information that they are given and ensure they successfully meet their obligations. This improvement is reflected in minutes of the governing body. During the inspection it was particularly pleasing that five governors were available to meet me, demonstrating their involvement in and the priority they place on the school tackling the areas for improvement identified. The governing body is making sure the school's progress is under regular review through the newly formed ERC, which reports its findings to all governors. The

recommended review of governance has been commissioned and is due to be carried out shortly by a national leader of governance now that the governing body has restructured and recruited additional members.

The required review of the use and impact of the pupil premium was completed in January 2016. This review praised the interventions already in place to support disadvantaged pupils. It made recommendations for further action, including more detailed analysis of the impact of actions and seeking feedback from disadvantaged pupils and their parents. Leaders have planned actions in response to the review.

All staff have recently completed safeguarding training and are fully up-to-date regarding protecting pupils from the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Governors are now able to monitor effectively and evaluate the school's work to safeguard pupils as a result of increased reporting to the identified safeguarding governor and the full governing body.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improving the quality of teaching has been a key action. The school's programme of teacher development and training is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Teachers across the school have welcomed the training and development opportunities they have received. For example, teachers share their best practice through reciprocal observation and coaching with their colleagues. Information provided by the school shows that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased this year. Teachers who do not meet the expected standard receive support and guidance that is tailored to their needs in addition to the training that all teachers receive. Leaders do not shy away from delivering hard messages to teachers when they are required. Although the impact of improvements in teaching are demonstrable on pupils' class work, it is too soon to see the sustained impact of these improvements on pupil outcomes.

Senior and middle leaders meet regularly and make effective use of the school's progress monitoring system to identify when pupils require additional support. Leaders ensure purposeful interventions out of class are targeted at pupils who require them, and that they address specific areas of weakness. Ongoing assessment information is used with increasing effectiveness by teachers to identify how well pupils are achieving and has resulted in higher expectations for what pupils can achieve. However, the work that most-able pupils are set is sometimes not sufficiently challenging, which slows progress, despite teachers having higher expectations. In addition, while teachers can identify pupils who require additional support, they are not always able to set work at the right level of difficulty or with the appropriate support to enhance progress in lessons. As a result, leaders are continuing to address this recommendation identified at the previous inspection.

Teachers are increasing their analysis of assessment information to close gaps in learning. For example, teachers now analyse the marks pupils achieve on particular examination questions and use this information to identify where pupils are less secure in subject content or skills. They then plan learning activities which

specifically focus on these areas. As a result, planning learning and additional interventions are targeted precisely to have the most impact on improving pupils' outcomes.

The work in pupils' books shows that teachers are increasingly meeting leaders' expectations regarding teaching and learning policies, but the quality still remains variable. For example, teachers often implement the school's new marking policy and make it clear to pupils how to improve their work, but this is not always the case.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils behave well in lessons and in moving around the school site. They are friendly, polite and well mannered. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and ensure the school environment is kept tidy and free from damage.

Pupils are proud and willing to discuss their work and share their achievements with me. There are very strong relationships between pupils and teachers and amongst pupils, which promotes a positive learning environment in classrooms. Teachers develop resilience and independence in pupils. For example, in design technology, pupils are encouraged to seek their own solutions to problems they encounter through having a question card that allows them to ask the teacher one question. This makes them give more attention to seeking their own solutions.

The number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school reduced sharply in 2014 and leaders have successfully maintained this improvement. However, the proportion of this group of pupils who do not attend school regularly still remains too high, particularly in Year 9. Leaders are aware of this and are using a range of strategies to support these pupils and their families.

The number of times that pupils were excluded for a short period because of poor behaviour remains similar to previous years. Analysis of these figures shows that exclusion was used as a last resort and for justifiable reasons. About half of the pupils excluded for a short period this year are disadvantaged, a similar proportion to previous years.

Outcomes for pupils

There is evidence that the outcomes for pupils are set to improve this year. The results in GCSE examinations last year continued a decline seen previously, and too few pupils made the progress that they should have done. There was variation in the outcomes achieved by particular groups of pupils, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils, and also between subjects. Leaders and teachers have been determined to make sure that all pupils in the current Year 11 have every opportunity to make up some of the ground they have lost. A number of specific and targeted interventions have been put in place to make sure that pupils were as well prepared as possible for their examinations. For example, pupils attended a programme of additional sessions after school to make sure they had completed all

necessary content as thoroughly as possible and to practise the skills required for the examinations.

More reliable school assessment information shows that the school's results are set to rise sharply this year. The strategies used to support Year 11 pupils have had a positive impact on the achievement of all pupils, particularly the most able, where outcomes are expected to reflect those of similar pupils nationally. However, the impact is less marked for some groups, particularly for boys. The use of the pupil premium funding is set to have a positive impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in 2016. Although the progress of disadvantaged pupils is expected to be below that of other pupils in the school and nationally, leaders' monitoring information shows that these gaps will have narrowed considerably from last year. Similar improvements in the progress of all pupils are demonstrated by the school's monitoring information for pupils in other year groups in the school.

External support

Governors have commissioned two national leaders of education (NLE) who provide a good level of support for school senior and middle leaders. This support is sharply focused on the school's priorities. For example, one NLE supports the governing body in setting and monitoring challenging and appropriate performance objectives for the headteacher. The other NLE has worked with senior leaders to ensure the school's action plan clearly addresses the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and regularly attends ERC meetings to review progress.

Leaders have established an outward-looking culture within the school. They encourage middle leaders to establish links with colleagues in a number of schools, particularly John Kyrle High School and Fairfield High School. This exchange of skills and knowledge is benefiting leaders in a number of ways including from sharing best practice and the external validation of assessments. As a result, the practice of middle leaders is improving.

The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies, including the local authority, to support pupils and their families.

Priorities for further improvement

- Revise systems used to analyse and evaluate information collected on different aspects of teaching in order to demonstrate the impact of actions taken to improve particular aspects of teaching over time.