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Dame Maureen Brennan
Bloxwich Academy
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Dear Dame Maureen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bloxwich Academy

Following my visit with Sandy Hayes Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 13 to 14 June 2017, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. 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 November 2015.

- Improve teaching so that pupils consistently make good or better progress and close the gaps in their learning and skills by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan lessons that capture pupils' interests so that they are motivated to learn
 - offer feedback that helps pupils to improve their work and understand what they need to do to succeed
 - use information about pupils' progress and attainment to plan activities that build on their prior knowledge, skills and understanding that results in pupils of different abilities being challenged to learn well
 - check pupils' progress in lessons to see if pupils need additional support or are ready to move on to more demanding work
 - know how to develop pupils' reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills in areas outside of English and mathematics.
- Improve leadership and management so that they have a sustained impact on pupils' outcomes, attendance and behaviour by:
 - making sure that accurate, reliable information about the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils, across all years, is used by leaders to help pupils catch up
 - rigorously monitoring the deployment of additional funding to raise the outcomes and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and to raise the attainment of pupils with lower attainment on entry to the secondary school
 - tackling weak teaching and underperformance in the school
 - developing the skills and expertise of middle leaders so that they are able to improve teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility
 - improving the curriculum and the quality of teaching of mathematics in the primary school
 - ensuring that the trust offers the primary school the support and resources needed to improve
 - recruiting a stable, substantive workforce of specialist teachers and leaders.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils in the secondary phase by:
 - setting clear expectations of pupils' conduct that are reinforced consistently by all members of staff
 - ensuring that pupils move around the site in a sensible and orderly manner
 - making sure that pupils speak to adults and each other respectfully and use appropriate language

- making sure that pupils follow instructions, listen to their teachers, start work quickly and sustain their concentration on tasks in lessons
- developing strategies that lead to a reduction in the rate of exclusions from the school.
- Improve pupils' attendance in the secondary phase so that the wide gap between their attendance and that of other pupils nationally reduces rapidly; this also includes considerably reducing the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school.
- Improve the sixth form by:
 - making sure that learners who have not secured a GCSE grade 3 or above in English or mathematics by the end of key stage 4 do so by the time they leave the sixth form
 - further raising achievement in academic subject areas so that outcomes are consistently good.
- Improve provision and standards in the early years by:
 - developing strong leadership, consistent high-quality teaching and robust assessment systems
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of children and helps them to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to succeed in primary school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 13 June 2017 to 14 June 2017

Evidence

Inspectors evaluated the school's work on both the primary and secondary school sites. They met with the executive headteacher and the chairs of the governing body and the advisory board. They also met with the associate headteachers of the primary and secondary phases and other senior and middle leaders.

Inspectors observed pupils' learning and behaviour in classrooms across all key stages. Senior leaders accompanied them on some of these visits. Inspectors spoke to pupils and looked at their work in class. An inspector also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work.

Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including self-evaluation, development plans, the school's website and information about how well pupils are doing.

Context

Staffing in the primary phase has remained consistent since the previous monitoring visit. This has brought stability for pupils. Some changes are planned for September as temporary staff will be replaced by permanent appointees. A substantive headteacher has been appointed.

Leaders have successfully appointed to almost all secondary teaching posts that have become vacant for September. As a result, leaders expect the secondary phase to be fully staffed at the start of the new school year. Leaders plan to increase further the number of teachers in some subjects to allow more flexibility and reduce further the sizes of some teaching groups. The director of post-16 learning has started work at the school since the previous inspection. The secondary headteacher plans to make some minor adjustments to the responsibilities of senior leaders for the new academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new permanent headteacher for the primary phase is working closely with the acting headteacher to ensure a smooth transition in leadership. This is helpful, because the new headteacher already has a clear knowledge of what needs to be done to improve urgently the quality of education provided in the primary phase.

There is still no stable leadership of the early years. This has prevented the extent of improvement that is necessary. High-quality external support has been provided for two half-days each week. This is well focused and helpful to teachers. As a result, the early years environment has continued to improve. Classrooms are now well organised. This helps children move sensibly and safely between activities. The

outdoor spaces are now secure and well resourced. The equipment available is much more suitable. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching has not improved sufficiently to ensure that children make good progress. The school lacks the internal expertise required to identify effective early years practice or to train teachers as needed.

Leaders continue to have a positive impact on the overall effectiveness of the secondary phase. They have the capacity to sustain recent improvements and further develop other aspects of the school. Middle leaders in the secondary phase benefit from regular development sessions that centre on their leadership skills. A focus on self-evaluation and making judgements against national standards ensures that reliable and realistic conclusions are reached. Teachers in the secondary phase attend development sessions that successfully introduce them to a range of learning and teaching strategies. Teachers often lead these sessions, which share and celebrate the best practice that exists within the school. Leaders ensure that the objectives for these sessions will provide the most benefit by researching thoroughly key issues that need to be addressed.

The associate headteachers prepare detailed and regular reports for the governing body. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of how well the school is doing. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities and effectively continue to support leaders as they address the areas for improvement. Governors challenge leaders appropriately to check that the actions taken are appropriate and this has a positive impact on the school. They remain focused clearly on their ambition to improve the overall effectiveness of the school.

Leaders identify sharply focused areas of development as a result of accurate self-evaluation. They provide clear, objective evidence for the judgements they make. Leaders at all levels have a high awareness of the identified areas for development, which inform the actions they take.

Leaders have clear plans in place to support the transition of pupils to the secondary phase. These plans include activities to introduce pupils to the school and to collect important information about pupils' starting points. Leaders will use this information to identify any additional support pupils may need, so this can be put in place as soon as pupils start Year 7. Similar plans are in place for the transition of pupils into the school's sixth form. Leaders' plans to accommodate increased numbers of students include a much wider range of subjects and additional enrichment opportunities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils across the school continue to benefit from the positive learning climate that teachers have established. Teachers do make sure that they plan lessons that capture pupils' interests. For example, in English literature, teachers select texts which captivate and motivate students. Students' engagement in the themes and issues around the texts they study is very high. Pupils are generally attentive and

focused on their work. Where this is not the case, teachers have not sufficiently addressed their starting points through their planning. As a result, tasks are either pitched at too low a level, or pupils have not received sufficient information or skills development to tackle them.

A numeracy coach has started to work in the secondary phase since the previous inspection. The coach provides additional, specialist interventions for targeted pupils. Appropriate diagnostic tests clearly identify which skills pupils need to focus on. The coach uses this information to target these areas specifically. Pupils' confidence in their numeracy skills is increasing as a result. Leaders have plans to evaluate the impact of this support on pupils' progress in mathematics at the next opportunity. Leaders make sure that there is a high profile on numeracy skills across the curriculum through the termly numeracy week. Leaders have introduced consistent approaches to common mathematical calculations across the school. This makes sure that pupils approach mathematical solutions in a similar manner when they encounter them in different subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour in the secondary phase continues to improve. Pupils now largely comply with school rules and follow teachers' instructions without question. Leaders report that pupils now take much greater responsibility for their own behaviour. They accept the consequences when they choose not to behave acceptably. As a result, exclusion rates have continued to reduce. The number of exclusions is now much more in line with that in other schools. Similarly, the number of occasions when pupils are required to work in isolation from the class has dropped substantially. These are now infrequent.

Leaders say that they have been able to move beyond enforcing behaviour rules and are now focusing on giving pupils a sense of ownership and worth. This is helping to improve pupils' attitudes to learning and commitment to the school community. This is reflected in the increased number of Year 10 pupils who applied to become prefects this year. Successful candidates are given impressive preparation for the role, including off-site team-building experiences, mentoring training, anti-bullying training and safeguarding training.

The satellite centre continues to provide essential support for the small number of pupils whose needs cannot be met exclusively in the main school provision. A group of Year 11 pupils have persevered with their schooling through to the end of the year because of the support provided by staff within the satellite centre. As a result, these pupils are successfully sitting their GCSE and other examinations. Most placements in the satellite centre are now on a short-term basis. The satellite centre has been effective in helping many pupils overcome the barriers to learning they face in the main school. This is reflected in improved attendance and behaviour records.

Overall, attendance figures are similar to last year. Leaders' analysis shows that the

number of pupils with very low attendance has dropped. Nevertheless, the high rates of their absence have a marked impact on the overall figure. Attendance rates are notably higher for Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils than for key stage 4. Leaders have implemented, reviewed and refined systems for tracking and rewarding attendance over the course of this year. These systems are now sharp and appear to be effective. Leaders intend to use these improved systems from the very start of the next academic year. Leaders anticipate that this will raise the profile of attendance among pupils and build upon the improved rates currently demonstrated in key stage 3.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders in the primary phase now collect helpful information about pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. This data shows a mixed picture. In some classes in Years 1 to 6, pupils are making progress in some subjects. This is not the case for all. Pupils' progress is not swift enough to make up the substantial amount of lost ground caused by weak teaching in recent years. In some classes, pupils have continued to fall behind and are now even further adrift in some subjects.

Intensive support given to Year 1 pupils in the second half of this year has helped them improve their phonics skills from very weak levels. As a result, the proportion likely to achieve the required standard in the national phonics screening check is close to the school's target. Nevertheless, the figure is a long way short of that in most other schools and shows a drop from last year. This is the legacy of the poor teaching these pupils received in the early years.

National assessment results for Year 2 pupils show that they have made steady progress since the end of their Reception Year. However, they began Year 1 so far behind pupils in other schools that there is still a long way to go for them to catch up to where they should be. In particular, boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have made slower progress than other groups of pupils.

Year 6 pupils recently sat national key stage 2 tests in reading, writing and mathematics. Results for these are not yet available. The school's assessment information suggests that the proportion likely to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics will rise from last year. However, this year's figure is likely to be a long way behind that in most other schools. Results for reading are expected to be close to those achieved by most pupils in other schools last year. Although leaders expect some improvement in results for mathematics this year, almost half of pupils will not have the degree of mathematical understanding they need to transfer to the demands of the secondary curriculum. Similarly, teachers' assessments of pupils' writing show that most pupils are behind the expected standard for their age. Outcomes in the primary phase are improving, but slowly.

Leaders have updated their tracking information about how well pupils in Year 11

are doing to include completed coursework marks and controlled assessments. There has been a dramatic rise in the proportion of pupils who have completed vocational qualifications this year compared to 2016. Additionally, pupils' attainment at higher grades in vocational qualifications looks set to be much improved. Similarly, pupils' attainment in the controlled assessment of GCSEs, for example science, is vastly improved compared to last year.

The school's assessment information continues to suggest improvements in pupils' attainment this summer. Currently, boys, pupils with average and high prior attainment and pupils who are not disadvantaged make stronger progress than other groups do. However, leaders think that it is likely that progress will remain below that of other pupils nationally. This is particularly the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who have low prior attainment. In addition, pupils who attend alternative provision are not making the progress in GCSE qualifications that leaders expect. Leaders continue to use the information they collect well to target additional support and interventions for pupils in the final run-up to their examinations.

Sixth-form leaders continue to expect that the strong increase in performance last year is likely to be bettered this year. Students' performance across applied general and academic qualifications is expected to be consistent. Previous discrepancies in how teachers monitor progress between types of qualification have been rectified.

External support

Leaders and teachers in the primary phase benefit from high-quality external support. The trust has commissioned a consultant to support the development of the early years. This support has effectively addressed some important areas for improvement. For example, the outdoor environment has been transformed into a welcoming and interesting learning space. A specialist leader of education is supporting leaders to develop consistency of expectations for presentation and of marking in the primary phase. Leaders regularly check pupils' books, which demonstrate that staff are compliant with the clear policies and expectations. However, it is too soon to demonstrate the impact of this external support on pupils' outcomes at this point.

Leaders continue to benefit from support provided by other schools in the Matrix Trust. For example, a leader from another school has recently carried out a focused review of the school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have produced a strategic plan in response to the review and are now beginning to take action.