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5 June 2018

Mrs Julia Kitson and Mrs Joanne James  
Acting Principals  
Exeter - A Learning Community Academy  
Brayford Avenue  
Corby  
Northamptonshire  
NN18 8DL

Dear Mrs Kitson and Mrs James

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter - A Learning Community Academy**

Following my visit with Stuart Edmonds, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 1 and 2 May 2018, 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 2016. 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 not 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 board of trustees and the chief executive

officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.**

- Improve leadership and management urgently, so that:
  - leaders identify the reasons why pupils are underachieving and so can take the right actions to ensure that the pupils make better progress
  - subject leaders have the knowledge and the opportunities necessary to bring about better teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
  - pupils enjoy a broad curriculum and their skills and knowledge in every subject grow as they move through the school
  - leaders provide accurate reports to governors about the school's performance
  - governors have the skills and confidence to hold leaders to account and to bring about school improvement
  - pupil premium funding is used effectively
  - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve outcomes for all pupils and raise the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - using information about the pupils' performance and the quality of teaching to provide effective training where it is required, particularly in the teaching of mathematics and reading
  - ensuring that the most able pupils receive work that is challenging and enables them to attain high standards
  - ensuring that teachers use lesson time efficiently and give pupils work that enables them to make at least good progress in all subjects
  - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to use and to develop their writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the early years by:
  - ensuring that leaders responsible for the early years make regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching and assessment in the Reception classes
  - ensuring that all necessary training is provided to secure better provision in the Reception classes
  - sharing the good practice evident in the Nursery.
- Improve pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour by reducing the rates of absence and persistent absence.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order 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 further improved.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 1 to 2 May 2018**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors held meetings with the acting principals, the assistant principal, the attendance officer and the chair of the local governing body. They met with the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Wallace Trust (formerly known as the Woodnewton Trust). Inspectors spoke with parents and carers as they brought their children to school. They spoke with pupils informally in class and as they moved around school. They held more formal discussions with a group of staff and a group of pupils. The inspectors met with the head of school development and two consultative principals from the Inspiring Futures through Learning multi-academy trust (IFtL).

Inspectors observed the learning taking place in every year group and examined a range of pupils' books. They observed pupils' behaviour during assembly, playtime and lunchtime.

The single central record of vetting checks was scrutinised. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation provided by the school, including that relating to safeguarding, school improvement and the progress pupils make.

### **Context**

The substantive principal is currently absent from school due to ill health. The two vice-principals are jointly undertaking the role of acting principal during his absence. They continue to be supported by the assistant principal. Since the monitoring visit in February 2018, three teachers have left the school and temporary teachers are currently teaching these classes. Three teachers are currently taking maternity leave and interim arrangements are in place to teach these classes.

Procedures are underway with a view to all the schools in The Wallace Trust ('the trust') being sponsored by IFtL in the future. The trust has secured the support of IFtL for the school during this period of transition. During this visit, two consultative principals from IFtL began their support of the school.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Until very recently, leaders, including governors, have been too slow to respond successfully to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The CEO of the trust has been present in the school almost every day since the substantive principal has been absent. She provides support for the remaining members of the leadership team.

In April 2018, the CEO and the two acting principals led the staff in a meeting to explore the current position of the school. Leaders formed three 'Drive Teams',

comprising staff at all levels from across the school, to address the areas for improvement that were identified at the school's last inspection. The teams have met and written action plans to enable them to address with greater precision the work that needs to be undertaken in their particular areas. It is too early to determine the long-term impact of these teams. However, early signs of progress can be seen. For example, staff agreed to improve the learning environment. They sought the views of pupils. Teachers have made a strong start, with attractive displays celebrating pupils' good work and by providing helpful displays which provide pupils with information they can refer to when they are working.

Staff who spoke with inspectors said that they appreciate leaders' efforts to include them in the development of the improvements the school needs to make through the Drive Teams. They value the fact that leaders listen to and take account of their views.

Leaders have provided several opportunities for teachers to meet with colleagues from schools across the trust to enable them to assess with greater accuracy pupils' attainment in writing. At the start of this term, teachers implemented a series of tests to support their own assessments of the progress pupils are making in reading, grammar, punctuation, spelling and mathematics. The results of these assessments are not yet being used strategically. This is because they have not been entered onto the electronic system that will analyse the data. This means that leaders are not able to use this information to ensure that pupils make better progress.

Subject leaders for reading, writing and mathematics are in place. Leadership of other subjects has still not begun. The acting principals have held discussions with teachers in preparation for allocating responsibilities for other subjects but this has not yet taken place.

The leader with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has provided some useful training for staff and has begun to monitor the interventions that are designed to support pupils. She does not check the provision for all pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. She is keen to improve this without delay so that all pupils benefit fully from the support they should receive. She is unable to track in detail the progress pupils make because the school does not currently have a robust system in place to do this.

The chair of the local governing body has a clear understanding of where improvements have been too slow and of the aspects that have been more successful. She is rightly very concerned that the progress the school has made over time has not been rapid enough and that too few sustainable improvements have been secured since the last inspection. She shows real determination to pursue the improvements that are necessary for the school to provide all pupils with a good quality of education. Leaders are only providing governors with accurate information about some aspects of school life. For example, as the accuracy of the

school's assessment information is still not secure, governors do not receive with confidence all the information they need about the progress pupils are making. Governors have had no training in recent months to enable them to hold leaders to account with greater rigour. Some governors visit the school to see it in action but reports from the visits show that they do not reliably ask challenging questions of leaders or check the school's procedures in detail. Governors need to improve their skills in undertaking this vital part of their role without delay.

The review of the use of the pupil premium funding took place in March 2018. An action plan to act on its findings has not been drawn up. Leaders, including governors, cannot account in sufficient detail for the impact of this significant amount of public funding on the pupils it is intended to support.

The school is currently part of the Wallace Trust. The process for all schools in the Wallace Trust to transfer to IFtL has begun. There is no confirmed final date for conversion. The leaders of the trust have brokered immediate support from IFtL because they recognise that the school cannot wait for the conversion process to be finalised. Staff from IFtL have started working with the school, for example by undertaking reviews and by appointing two experienced principals to act as consultative principals supporting the school's own leadership. The consultative principals joined the school in May 2018. It is far too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of this support.

Leaders at all levels have welcomed the reviews undertaken by a headteacher from the trust and from IFtL. The reviews have provided information about current strengths and weaknesses across the school. Leaders have not written a precise improvement plan to address the findings of these reviews and the areas for improvement identified at the last Ofsted inspection. This must be done immediately so that leaders can address with urgency the issues raised.

Some work has been undertaken to update the school's website. There is still work to do to ensure that it provides parents with all the information they require.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school remains too variable. Leaders have not systematically monitored the quality of teaching and learning. Neither have they fully developed the strategies that have been implemented to improve teaching across the school. They do not have a clear strategy for providing staff with the training they need to improve their practice. Some work has been undertaken to improve the coaching skills of some staff and a few teachers have had the opportunity to share good practice. These strategies are piecemeal and have not led to wholesale improvements in provision across the school. Leaders must develop and urgently implement a clear strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Despite this, there have been some successes. During this school year, leaders have implemented strategies to improve the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. These strategies have been introduced in some year groups but not throughout the school. Pupils' books show that, where the approaches have been implemented fully, supported by appropriate training for staff, they are beginning to improve the quality of pupils' writing and some aspects of their mathematics. Pupils' books also show that teachers provide a range of opportunities to write at length, both in English lessons and across the curriculum.

Where teaching is stronger, teachers provide clear explanations for pupils and plan tasks that build on what pupils already know and can do. In these lessons, teachers use well-considered questions to encourage pupils to explain their thinking.

While there are pockets of stronger practice in some classes, too often teachers do not use time well or have high enough expectations of pupils in lessons. Teachers do not reliably match the work they provide for pupils, including those who are the most able, with their next steps in learning. Some pupils are asked to complete work that is too easy or too difficult for them. Sometimes, teachers check during lessons how well pupils are grasping the concepts and techniques being taught. They step in to provide additional explanations for pupils who will benefit from them and provide more challenging work for those pupils who are ready to tackle it. However, too often, because teachers do not assess pupils' understanding carefully enough, they miss pupils who would benefit from this additional support and challenge.

Teachers are beginning to use the information provided by the assessments of pupils' English and mathematics to plan learning that builds on what pupils know and can do. This is still in the early stages of development and is more successful in some classes than others. Leaders have not provided teachers with training to enable them to use information effectively. It is too early to judge the long-term impact this is having on improving the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make.

Teachers in the early years provide children with activities that are designed to promote the characteristics of effective learning. For example, children can explore and be creative with water, sand and paint. They develop their physical skills on climbing frames, well supervised by adults who encourage them to 'have a go'. Often, but not consistently, adults develop children's language through talking and asking questions. Leaders have only supported improvements in the early years informally since the last monitoring visit. There have been limited opportunities for staff in the early years to share good practice since the last monitoring visit, mainly due to staff absence.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The school's attendance officer has received support from an attendance officer from another school within the trust. This has enabled her to analyse the impact of the strategies she is implementing. She has continued to implement rewards, such as mascots, for good levels of attendance. She works closely with those families whose children's attendance is of particular concern. While she can point to several examples where individual pupils' attendance has improved, leaders do not evaluate the strategies in sufficient depth to know what is working well. Rates of attendance are still below those seen nationally and persistent absence is almost three times the national average for 2017.

Pupils with whom the inspector spoke say that behaviour is generally good in school for the majority of pupils. They say that bullying does sometimes occur but they agreed that they could speak to an adult in school who would deal with it for them. During the key stage 2 assembly, pupils listened attentively and respectfully to the new consultative principal as he introduced himself to them. In lessons where teachers have high expectations and provide pupils with clear explanations, pupils engage well with their learning. Pupils drift off-task and become distracted when the quality of teaching is weaker and the teachers' expectations of the pupils are not as well established. When this happens, time in lessons is lost as teachers have to repeat instructions, ask pupils to be attentive and wait for them to be ready.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

The school's own assessment information shows that too many pupils are not achieving the expected standards for their age in English or mathematics. Leaders do not track the progress pupils make with accuracy. This means that they cannot be certain that pupils of all abilities, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, are making the progress of which they may be capable. Pupils' books show that pupils are making progress from their different starting points but this remains inconsistent between classes.

Leaders do not know with certainty whether the use of the pupil premium funding is diminishing the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. This is because they do not evaluate closely the effectiveness of the spending of this funding.

## **External support**

Since the last monitoring visit, the trust has provided valuable support to the leadership of the school. The trust has continued to cooperate with IFtL with a view to IFtL sponsoring the school in the future. The headteacher from another trust school has worked alongside the acting principals to undertake a review of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This provided not only useful information but also training for the acting principal to make use of in her future

monitoring work.

The trust has provided support for the attendance officer and the site manager to be able to undertake their roles more effectively. Teachers from schools across the trust have worked together to discuss their assessments of pupils' work. This has helped teachers to improve the accuracy of their judgements. The CEO provides continuous support for the acting principals in their interim role.

The trust has brokered support from IFtL. For example, IFtL has undertaken a review of the school and a review of the spending of the pupil premium funding. Senior staff from IFtL have produced an overarching plan for actions to improve the school. Leaders have plans afoot to undertake further work with IFtL to develop detailed improvement plans.

Two consultative principals started their work at the school during the monitoring visit. Each will be on-site two days per week to support leadership capacity and to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.