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Mr Qamar Riaz
Headteacher
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West Midlands
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Dear Mr Riaz

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Walsall E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with David Hughes, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 27 and 28 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint one newly qualified teacher to the humanities department.

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

Peter Humphries

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2016.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to accelerate pupils' progress and raise standards by:
 - raising expectations of teachers to ensure that they believe pupils are capable of more-challenging work
 - taking full account of pupils' current knowledge, skills and understanding when planning lessons so that all groups of pupils are challenged to do and achieve their best
 - collecting accurate information about the progress of pupils in key stage 3
 - developing pupils' resilience and confidence, especially in key stage 3
 - accurately identifying and meeting the learning needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and disadvantaged pupils, so that they make at least good progress
 - continuing to improve achievement in the sixth form by ensuring that learners make sufficient progress in lessons, particularly in academic courses.

- Improve the behaviour of pupils by:
 - eliminating low-level disruption through consistent implementation of the academy's behaviour management systems so that pupils are clear about expectations and are not prevented from learning
 - developing systematic and coherent structures for the analysis of pupils' behaviour so that it can be monitored over time and the effectiveness of strategies to improve behaviour can be fully evaluated
 - further developing strategies to improve the attendance of those disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs or disability who are regularly absent.

- Improve leadership and management so that they have a sustained impact on pupils' outcomes, by making sure that leaders:
 - tackle the remaining weak teaching within the academy
 - ensure that all middle leaders, including those who are new, have appropriate expertise in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and check that these skills are being used effectively to improve outcomes
 - ensure that the academy is fully staffed with suitably qualified teachers
 - ensure that the academy's curriculum provides pupils, particularly those in key stage 3, with more opportunities to prepare for life in modern Britain
 - quickly develop a clear and effective role for academy ambassadors within the new governance arrangements of the academy.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27 June to 28 June 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents including the information on current pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. Inspectors met with you, the school's senior and middle leaders, staff, pupils and representatives of E-ACT, the school's sponsor. Inspectors considered the views of pupils and parents from the responses to the school's own questionnaires. There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, for these to be considered. Inspectors evaluated pupils' work in all year groups through an extensive scrutiny of pupils' books across a range of subjects. Inspectors checked records of staff's suitability to work with children.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in January 2017, two members of the leadership team and the leader with responsibility for literacy across the curriculum have left the school. You have appointed a new director of learning and teaching and a co-director of mathematics to start at the school in September 2017. You have appointed two full-time teachers to the science and mathematics departments. These teachers were previously supply teachers at the school. The school is fully staffed for the start of the autumn term 2017. You are relaunching the sixth form in the autumn term. At the time of this inspection, you had recruited 60 students to Year 12. There will be no pupils in Year 13.

On the first day of this inspection, pupils and staff were engaged in the school's sports day. On the second day of the inspection, approximately 50% of the pupils were not in school due to a school rewards trip to a theme park.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and your leadership team have sustained the improvements seen at the previous inspection in January 2017. The continued improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' behaviour are evidence of this. You and other leaders demonstrate a clear determination to make sure the school improves further. The vast majority of staff share your vision and understand what they need to do to improve pupils' outcomes. Staff who spoke to inspectors said that they appreciate the training and support they receive. Staff morale is sound. As a result, you have greatly reduced staff turnover.

You have appointed enough experienced and qualified staff to make sure that you have a full complement of teachers for the start of the autumn term. You have quickly and suitably replaced leaders who have left the school. You have appropriately reassigned areas of responsibility to other leaders to make sure you do not lose the momentum of school improvement.

You are aware that inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and in the application of some of the school's policies. This is particularly the case in the teaching of English and mathematics and in the development of pupils' literacy skills. Middle leaders are not addressing the inconsistencies and weaknesses in these areas with sufficient urgency. As a result, pupils across the school are not rapidly improving their literacy skills. In addition, the work in pupils' books shows that pupils are not doing well in English and mathematics, particularly in Years 7 and 8.

The range of lessons and extra-curricular activities on offer for pupils is wide-ranging and gives pupils experiences in languages, mathematics, science, technology, art, music, physical education and personal, social, health and economic education. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and to appreciate and uphold civic values. For example, during this inspection, pupils were engaged in perceptive and mature discussions about terrorism and how it does not fit with British values or with their own faith, culture and beliefs. However, a few older pupils have a limited understanding of the risks of female genital mutilation. You are keen that pupils develop a love of learning and that lessons do not focus solely on examination preparation. The work in pupils' books shows that the majority of teachers adhere to this vision and the work they set is interesting and engaging.

The school's safeguarding arrangements are a strength. For example, the checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough, detailed and well organised. Safeguarding and child protection training is frequent and suitable. As a result, staff are vigilant and understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe.

The arrangements for the relaunch of the sixth form are well established. Students in Year 12 will study a range of predominantly academic subjects. However, you are providing a range of vocational subjects where there is the demand. This inspection shows that the school is likely to continue to meet the 16 to 19 study programme requirements when it is relaunched.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

You and your leadership team continue to improve the quality and consistency of teaching across the majority of subjects and year groups. Staff and pupils say that the reduced number of supply teachers has significantly contributed to this improvement. Staff value the training, guidance and support they receive from senior and middle leaders and fellow teachers. Staff who spoke to inspectors said that this coaching helps them to improve their teaching skills and pupils' knowledge and understanding. The work in pupils' books reflects teachers' secure subject knowledge and their ability to explain concepts and ideas clearly and accurately.

The full inspection in March 2016 identified that teachers should take full account of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and give them more-challenging work.

The work in pupils' books shows that this is largely happening across the school. However, inconsistencies remain. In mathematics, for example, pupils in Years 7 and 8 are not developing their ability to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding through having to solve increasingly difficult problems or to reason mathematically. In addition, pupils in the same year groups are not rapidly improving their spelling, punctuation and grammar nor developing their ability to write at length. You and your middle leaders acknowledge that the work given to a minority of pupils in the first two years of key stage 3 does not build on what they have done in key stage 2 sufficiently.

The whole-school approach to developing pupils' literacy skills is variable. Teachers of history and religious education, for example, identify mistakes and misconceptions quickly and provide effective feedback and guidance to pupils on how to improve. Pupils' writing in these subjects shows secure improvement. However, in English and other subjects, teachers do not consistently identify or correct common spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes. As a result, pupils repeat the same errors and the quality of their writing suffers. In addition, while you have invested in a commercial reading scheme, pupils are not yet reading widely and often.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Staff and pupils who spoke to inspectors said that pupils' behaviour continues to improve. Information provided by the school supports this view. The number of fixed-term exclusions and incidents of poor behaviour have reduced significantly. You have not permanently excluded any pupils this academic year. During this inspection, the large majority of pupils engaged positively in their learning, particularly in key stage 3. The work in pupils' books shows that the majority of pupils take their work seriously, present it neatly and accurately and respond well to teachers' feedback. However, there are a few pupils who have not responded to teachers' higher expectations. In addition, during this inspection, a few Year 10 pupils disrupted the learning of others, were rude to staff and were reluctant to follow reasonable requests to behave appropriately.

You have suitable systems in place to identify, challenge and support pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. These systems are largely effective and the overall attendance figures are broadly in line with the national average. However, pupils' attendance over the two days of this inspection fell below 90%. In addition, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not attend school regularly enough. You and your team have taken appropriate actions to address this issue but you accept that the improvements have not been quick enough.

Outcomes for pupils

You have an effective system for collecting, evaluating and reviewing information about pupils' progress. You use this system to track pupils' progress effectively. You

have a clear picture of which groups of pupils are doing well and those who are doing less well in each subject. The majority of teachers are using this information to plan learning that meets pupils' needs, including for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged. For example, the majority of pupils who are disadvantaged are doing as well as, and sometimes better than, their peers in a range of subjects.

Information provided by the school accurately shows that the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well as they should in English, mathematics and science in Year 9. You acknowledge that, while there have been improvements, pupils' progress in Year 9 is not good enough. The work in their books shows that teachers are now making sure pupils make better progress. However, Year 9 pupils still have significant gaps in their knowledge and learning that, until closed, will significantly hinder their progress.

The work in Year 10 pupils' books shows that their progress is variable across and within subjects. The improvements in the quality of teaching mean that pupils are making better progress more recently.

During this inspection, there were no post-16 students in the school. Information provided by the school shows that Year 13 students are likely to meet their target grades in the vast majority of their chosen subjects. All of the students who want to go to university have secured a place at their first choice institution. The remaining students have secured apprenticeships or employment and training.

External support

The trust continues to provide effective support to you and your staff. The trust collects information from visits to the school and through frequent meetings to challenge and support school leaders. For example, trust members test leaders' assertions about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by visiting lessons and evaluating the work in pupils' books. The trust has confidence in you and your leadership team. The improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour show that this conviction is not misplaced.