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Mrs A Donaghy
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Donaghy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Noel-Baker Academy

Following my visit with Nina Bee and Michael Wilson, Ofsted Inspectors to your school on 4 and 5 December 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 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 July 2018.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to 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 Derby City. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Davies
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2018.

- Urgently address the significant failings in the school's safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that school leaders:
 - carry out their duties in line with trust policies and statutory guidance
 - implement and monitor a robust and rigorous protocol for tracking and reducing internal truancy so that leaders know where pupils are throughout the school day
 - establish systems and lines of responsibility for pupils attending alternative provision or on part-time timetables, which are effective in ensuring that these pupils are safe and well, and their needs are being met.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the trust is more rigorous in its monitoring of the actions and the impact of school leaders on improving the school
 - building the capacity of senior leaders, including in the sixth form, so that they can lead their areas of responsibility effectively
 - ensuring that senior and middle leaders implement an effective action plan to bring about timely and sustainable improvements
 - ensuring that senior leaders support subject leaders in gaining the skills to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance check that leaders use the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the Year 7 catch-up funding effectively in order to raise the achievement, attendance and behaviour of eligible pupils
 - making sure that the school's strategies for the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress, and the systems to monitor their attendance and behaviour, are fit for purpose.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and their impact on pupils' progress by:
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve, including the presentation and quality of pupils' work
 - improving pupils' attitudes to learning
 - ensuring that teachers use information about pupils' abilities and needs to plan learning that sufficiently challenges the most able pupils and provides focused support for the least able so that they all make good progress

- making sure that teachers ensure that boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive better support so that they can catch up with other pupils
- sharing the pockets of stronger teaching practice that exist within school.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum provides equality of opportunity for all, promotes pupils' and students' personal, social, health and economic education and provides them with an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities
 - making sure that pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs are met, and pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain
 - supporting all pupils to become more self-confident learners and to show respect for each other and the adults in school
 - ensuring that leaders and staff deal promptly and effectively with all incidents of poor behaviour and bullying so that their occurrence is minimised and pupils feel safe
 - eradicating low-level disruption in class so that all pupils can make at least good progress
 - putting effective strategies in place to improve punctuality and reduce absence and persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Improve provision in the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - leaders have a closer oversight of the sixth-form provision, including of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the impact of support to address underachievement of students in their studies
 - all teachers plan learning activities that challenge students and enable them to make at least good progress from their starting points
 - sixth-form students attend well.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 December 2018

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and members of support and teaching staff. They also met with the chair, chief executive and director of education of Lead, Empower, Achieve, Drive (LEAD) multi-academy trust. Inspectors also met with representatives of the parent forum. Inspectors met formally with groups of pupils and spoke to others informally around school. Inspectors visited parts of 26 lessons, many with senior leaders, and discussed the strengths and weaknesses observed. They also visited tutor sessions and observed two assemblies. They looked at samples of pupils' work and talked to pupils about their work in their lessons. Inspectors considered a variety of documents, including improvement plans, records of monitoring activities, information about pupils' progress and attainment, records relating to attendance and behaviour and information about safeguarding arrangements. They also read minutes of meetings of the parent forum and the trust and looked at a range of policies and information published on the school website.

The inspection did not focus on all areas for improvement as detailed in Annex A. Aspects related to the curriculum, personal, social and health education (PSHE), spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and preparation for life in modern Britain, as well as improvement of provision in the sixth form were not considered as part of this monitoring visit.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left the school in the summer. The new headteacher started at the beginning of September. Since then, the headteacher has clarified senior and middle leadership responsibilities. She has established a line management structure with clear lines of accountability. A number of teachers, including supply teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. Many new teachers started at the beginning of the autumn term, and there is now a full complement of teaching and support staff. Staff attendance and morale is much improved from the time of the previous inspection. Those with responsibility for governance and senior leaders decided not to offer a Year 12 curriculum in September 2018. The sixth form is currently composed of 21 Year 13 students.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has been instrumental in bringing about significant change within the school. She leads with determination and has gained the trust and confidence of many within the school community. She has high aspirations for pupils, and high expectations of all staff. The headteacher is fully committed to the school and the success of its pupils.

The headteacher is ably supported by three experienced colleagues and four relatively new senior leaders. Clarification of senior leadership roles means that they are focused in their work. Clear lines of accountability and responsibility have been established. Senior leaders now have a precise understanding of the school's improvement priorities and their roles in bringing about an effective and rapid transformation.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas needing significant improvement. They have written detailed improvement plans, which are reviewed regularly and amended accordingly. Leaders carry out regular monitoring activities, so that their evaluation of the school's effectiveness is up to date. Leaders are providing accurate information about the school's work to trust representatives and directors. This has also contributed to the effectiveness of trustees in holding leaders to account. Senior leaders benefit from the coaching provided by educational consultants to increase their confidence, develop their leadership and management skills, and extend their ability to lead strategic improvement.

The headteacher has identified four key areas on which to base the school's improvement: establish good order, regain confidence, established lines of accountability and ensure that safeguarding is effective. These underpin all aspects of the school's improvement work. Staff understand these priorities and know what they should be doing to bring about much-needed improvement. Collectively the staff are working to improve the school.

Leaders have worked effectively to address serious shortcomings in safeguarding. There is currently a strong and effective culture of keeping pupils safe. Leaders commissioned an external review and have responded to the recommendations swiftly by writing a safeguarding policy which underpins the systems and procedures, which are understood by staff. All personnel files have been reviewed and safer recruitment processes implemented. Leaders undertake all of the required pre-employment checks before appointing adults to work with pupils.

Senior leaders with specific responsibility for safeguarding know and understand their roles thoroughly. They ensure that the correct steps are taken to safeguard pupils and they work well with external agencies. Safeguarding records are thorough and mostly accurate. Staff are suitably trained, know their responsibilities and take action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

The school site has been made secure. Pupils and parents who spoke with inspectors say that the school is now a safer place than it was at the time of the last inspection. Systems to monitor pupils' attendance have been established with a reduction in the number of pupils attempting to truant. Leaders have also established productive links with those offering alternative provision in order to monitor attendance and ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Middle leaders welcomed clarification of their responsibilities and value the support

provided to develop their leadership and management skills. Subject leaders understand their strategic roles to improve curriculum planning, teaching and learning, and outcomes for pupils. Many subject leaders benefit from leadership coaching provided through the trust. Pastoral leaders lead year teams of tutors and pupils and they are focused on improving behaviour and attendance. Regular line management meetings hold middle leaders to account and contribute to school improvement. These actions are beginning to increase the capacity of middle leaders to make further improvements.

Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have established a set of lesson planning expectations. A revised lesson structure is used consistently across the school. Teachers understand the structure and plan their lessons accordingly. But there is much variability in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. Forthcoming training is focused on teaching that meets pupils' needs and improves learning and progress.

Senior leaders have worked strategically to develop systems to assess and monitor pupils' learning and progress. Leaders are taking steps to ensure that targets and assessment information are accurate. Given the lack of adequate monitoring systems in the past, the new systems are beginning to provide valuable information for teachers, leaders, pupils and parents. However, assessment information is not consistently accurate across all subjects. Similarly, a revised approach to monitoring behaviour and attendance has been put into place. Leaders are beginning to monitor and evaluate the impact on pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Leaders provide opportunities for teachers to share stronger teaching practice through regular training and teacher coaching sessions. Teachers value these opportunities. Those who met with inspectors commented on the clarity of expectations and improved behaviour systems that enable teachers to be more effective in their classrooms.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding has been commissioned. This will happen before the end of the autumn term. Leaders have reviewed last year's pupil premium plan as being ineffective. They have written a much-improved 2018/19 plan focused on improving attendance, attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils. Trustees and trust officers have undertaken a review of governance for the entire trust. The review outcome had not been received at the time of this monitoring inspection.

Governance arrangements have been strengthened. The headteacher and senior leaders are held to account by trustees and officers at regular 'core' meetings. Trust officers systematically monitor the actions undertaken to bring about improvements, as detailed in the improvement plan. Those responsible for governance now have an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There is also a sharp focus on establishing and maintaining sustainable improvement in all aspects of the school, including governance.

The headteacher has worked to build positive relationships with parents. She has met with parents to address their many concerns and share plans for improvement. She has established a new parent forum which meets regularly to openly share parental views and concerns. The forum enables senior leaders to understand parental fears and helps parents understand the headteacher's drive for improvement. A typical comment from a member of the parent forum recognised a change in parental views from 'desperation and frustration' to recognising 'that great things have been achieved in three months, with much more to do'. Members of the parent forum speak very highly of the headteacher's commitment and determination to improve the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent between and within departments. The implementation of the new teaching and learning policy has contributed to improvements in teaching, but weaknesses remain. Teachers plan lessons in line with the new structure, but they do not routinely plan activities which meet the learning needs of different groups of pupils. Teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough and there is insufficient challenge and support for most groups of pupils. Pupils' learning and progress is not as good as it should be. Leaders have introduced a new assessment and feedback policy, which is used with varying degrees of success. Even though many pupils improve their work using the 'green pen' approach, errors and misconceptions are not consistently addressed.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are variable. Most pupils are compliant and engage with their work. However, too few are enthusiastic and keen to learn. A small minority do not engage well and are sometimes disruptive.

There are pockets of stronger teaching where teachers have secure subject knowledge, use questioning effectively to deepen understanding and adapt their plans to meet pupils' needs. Despite much improvement, increasing the consistency and improving the quality of teaching in all areas of the school remains a priority.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have developed a new approach to behaviour management. The school year started with a focus on high behavioural expectations with a 'boot camp' approach for all pupils. Pupils who met with inspectors expressed the view that behaviour has improved. They understand the new approach that recognises good behaviour alongside clear consequences for those who fail to meet expectations. Most teachers are confident in using the new behaviour system, but there is some inconsistency in the application of the policy. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is mostly compliant, but some low-level disruption occurs when pupils do not engage with their learning. Staff deal with uncooperative behaviour and rudeness promptly. Behaviour at break and lunchtime is mostly polite and sociable. However, some instances of poor and disrespectful behaviour were seen by inspectors in the dining hall.

Leaders have established systems to monitor pupils' behaviour and early analysis shows a slight improvement. The number of permanent, fixed-term, and internal exclusions has declined this term. Senior and middle leaders monitor behaviour and intervene where necessary to ensure that pupils are provided with support. Pupils who spoke with inspectors have a clear understanding of what bullying is and say that bullying still occurs. However, they are more confident that bullying incidents are dealt with more effectively than in the past.

Attendance and punctuality have improved since the last inspection. This also includes attendance of students in the sixth form. Leaders have restructured the school day and regularly reinforce raised attendance expectations. There is a sense of purpose around school and most pupils make their way quickly to their next lessons. Leaders' monitoring information indicated that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing slightly and average attendance is improving. However, too many pupils do not attend regularly and the attendance rate is still not high enough.

Leaders have introduced a daily PSHE tutor session. Leaders have ensured that all pupils and students have received teaching related to their well-being, keeping safe and raising awareness of risks in different situations. This supports the school's positive approach to safeguarding.

Outcomes for pupils

A history of low expectations and poor teaching has limited pupils' attainment and progress in recent years. Provisional outcomes for 2018 show very poor progress in English, mathematics, science, humanities and a range of other subjects. Disadvantaged and the most able pupils made even less progress than other pupils. These measures also reflect a decline in progress when compared to 2017. Attainment in English and mathematics showed increasing proportions of pupils gaining grade 4 and 5 and above when compared with 2017 outcomes. However, these proportions are well below national averages. Despite improved attainment in English and mathematics, progress in both subjects was weaker than in 2017.

Leaders have introduced a new system to assess, monitor and evaluate the outcomes of current pupils, this is in its early stages of being used. Leaders are not yet able to determine the accuracy of assessment information or evaluate pupils' progress.

External support

Since the last inspection, trust leaders have provided school leadership support focused on increasing the capacity for improvement, strategic planning and monitoring school improvement. These include three educational consultants providing senior leadership professional development and coaching. Specialist leaders of education and subject consultants work to improve subject leadership.

Regular monitoring activities and meetings are undertaken to quality assure the accuracy of information provided to trustees. Leaders commissioned an external review of safeguarding and responded swiftly to recommendations to bring about improvements.