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Mr Clive Zimmerman
Abbey Park School
The Learning Campus
Redhouse Way
Swindon
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Dear Mr Zimmerman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Abbey Park School

Following my visit with Simon Rowe, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Martin Watson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 22–23 November 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 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 September 2016.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Swindon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - improving the accuracy of leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses and using the information to plan appropriate improvements
 - carrying out thorough risk assessments for all activities when pupils are off-site during the school day and use the findings to adequately protect pupils
 - ensuring governors focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress pupils make, holding leaders rigorously to account
 - evaluating the impact that additional funding has on raising the outcomes of pupils for whom it is intended
 - training all staff to recognise the risks and indicators of radicalisation and extremism
 - taking action to eradicate racist incidents.
- Urgently take action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - use the information they keep on pupils' achievement to plan work which builds on what pupils already know, can do and understand
 - have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - challenge the most able pupils to think more deeply about their learning
 - accurately assess pupils' learning and address any misconceptions quickly
 - provide opportunities for pupils to understand the risks in society, particularly around radicalisation and extremism.
- Accelerate the progress made by all pupils, especially the boys and disadvantaged pupils, so they achieve as well as other pupils nationally from their starting points.
- Ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils:
 - improve their attendance
 - improve their behaviour so that the number of exclusions falls further
 - have their academic needs met through teachers' planning so that their progress accelerates rapidly.

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 improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 22–23 November 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal, the operational principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils and two members of the interim executive board, including the chair.

Inspectors conducted joint visits to lessons with leaders to observe pupils' learning and behaviour, and scrutinised pupils' books to monitor learning.

Context

The school's governing body was replaced by an interim executive board following the last inspection. It negotiated a management partnership with Park Academies Trust. This has been in place since November 2016. As a result of this arrangement, the school is led by the principal of Lydiard Park Academy in an executive capacity and by a former Lydiard Park Academy vice-principal on an operational basis. This is an interim arrangement while the detail of Abbey Park School joining Lydiard Park Academy and the Park Academies Trust in a multi-academy trust is finalised.

There has been a significant turnover of staff since the last inspection. Leaders have taken the opportunity to strengthen key areas. There has also been a reorganisation of senior leadership roles and the senior team has been augmented by additional expertise from Lydiard Park Academy.

As part of leaders' efforts to energise the school and drive forward improvements, the school has been renamed and pupils have a new uniform.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have a very clear and accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses and have set about addressing them in an ambitious but pragmatic manner. This experienced and skilful leadership has underpinned improvements across the school because teachers and pupils feel that they are in safe hands.

Leaders understood the importance of increasing the capacity of the senior leadership team and acted swiftly to add capacity from the Park Academies Trust and to clarify the roles of other senior colleagues. As a result of their work, leadership capacity is significantly strengthened. This has made rapid progress in some areas possible. For example, the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, which was previously identified as a weakness, has been substantially improved. Consequently, these pupils are absent less often, behave better and make more progress.

The leadership of the pupil premium has also improved. A review of how the additional funding was spent was carried out and leaders acted quickly to focus resources on improving outcomes. Sensibly, leaders initially concentrated on intervening with Year 11 pupils to secure the best grades possible in English and mathematics. However, they understand that deep and long lasting improvement will only come from improving the quality of teaching that these pupils receive. They have therefore begun to focus their energies on ensuring that these pupils receive high-quality teaching every day. Improvements are taking place but leaders know there is much more to do. The effectiveness of provision for pupil premium pupils is not yet monitored in the depth that is evident in monitoring provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Senior leaders have made their expectations of middle leaders clear and have supported them in meeting those expectations. Middle leaders monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment closely and meet with their senior colleagues regularly to discuss progress. This has led to significant improvements across the curriculum. Improvement is not equally strong across all areas, however. Improvements in English and modern languages are particularly worthy of note.

Leaders have been very effective in addressing the shortcomings in safeguarding that were highlighted in the last inspection. All the necessary risk assessments and other systems which were weak have been strengthened and are now effective. Safeguarding has a high profile across the school as a result of the strong and positive leadership of this area.

The interim executive board has overseen the response to the findings of the last inspection with moral commitment and clear focus on improving outcomes for young people. It acted rapidly to secure strong senior leadership for the school and it has worked constructively with partners to ensure the school's long-term future. Members have a good understanding of the structural processes of academisation and of the staffing and financial changes that are under way. Members also have an understanding of the academic performance of the school, but not to the same depth. As the structural changes embed, the next challenge for them is to hold leaders to account robustly for the quality of teaching and consequent improvements in standards.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving but is not yet of a consistently high standard.

There are numerous examples of strong practice across the school that are leading to pupils making good progress. For example, in English, pupils are making better progress than previously because they are taught increasingly well. Teachers have high expectations and pupils rise to meet them. Pupils are set challenging work that encourages them to think deeply. However, too many teachers still do not have

appropriately high expectations of their pupils. As a result, too often, pupils' progress is limited and standards remain low.

Some teachers are not reliably able to identify what pupils can and cannot do. They therefore cannot accurately plan lessons that move pupils on to the next steps in their learning. Leaders have asked teachers to provide feedback to pupils in a consistent style. While teachers are consistent, too often their advice is not sufficiently focused on the next steps pupils should take, and so the opportunity is lost.

Leaders expect teachers to focus particularly on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils play an active part in their lessons. They are having some success but inconsistencies remain. Where disadvantaged pupils are given additional support, they make progress in line with other pupils. However, when teaching is weaker, they give up more quickly and work remains incomplete. They also need extra encouragement to respond to the feedback teachers provide.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils act sensibly and with courtesy to others. The gaps in the curriculum around addressing the dangers of radicalism and extremism have been filled. Pupils report that they feel the school community is a safe and tolerant one.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning when they are inspired by high-quality teaching. When teaching does not meet their needs because it is not challenging or stimulating, they are compliant but sit back and disengage.

Many pupils have high aspirations for their future careers but they are not well informed about how to achieve their goals. Opportunities for them to learn about careers are limited, particularly in key stage 3.

Outcomes for pupils

In the 2017 GCSE examinations, pupils made significantly slower than national average progress. It was broadly similar to that achieved in 2016. However, attainment in English and mathematics did improve. Disadvantaged pupils did make better progress than in the previous year but it remained very weak.

Pupils currently in the school are generally making better progress. In English, standards are significantly better than they were. Pupils can develop and structure their ideas in pieces of extended writing. There is also good evidence of improvement in other subjects, for example in modern languages and science. However, a significant number of pupils do not make good progress in mathematics, largely because they are not pushed to think deeply but left to repeat work they can do.

External support

The school's effective progress towards the removal of special measures is almost entirely the result of Lydiard Park Academy's effective engagement with the school while the process of joining the two schools in a multi-academy trust takes place. The support of the local authority in creating the interim executive board has also played a key role.

The management partnership with Lydiard Park Academy began in November 2016 and progress has been substantial since that time. This means that the school is well placed to build on the foundations now in place when the multi-academy trust is operational next year.