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Mark Allchorn
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Dear Mr Allchorn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Barclay School

Following my visit with Andrew Maher, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 September 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 most 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 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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school 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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers use the information they have about pupils' prior learning to plan lessons that meet pupils' different aptitudes, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - effectively implementing recent changes in the mathematics curriculum to quickly build pupils' mathematical understanding and skills.
- Raise outcomes for pupils, including in the sixth form, by:
 - persistently and consistently applying the recently introduced strategies for raising the attendance of all pupils, especially of those whose absence rates are high
 - accelerating pupils' progress in mathematics across all year groups
 - ensuring that teaching in the sixth form meets the needs of pupils who are at different stages of their learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment accurately so that rapid improvements can be made across all subjects
 - ensuring that leaders check, report on and publish the effectiveness of pupil premium funding spending, making sure that the strategies implemented are rapidly reducing the differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other, non-disadvantaged, pupils.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2017 to 13 September 2017

Evidence

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors observed the school's work and reviewed documents linked to the school's performance, the views of parents, and child protection and safeguarding arrangements. They met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority. The lead inspector also spoke on the telephone with the school improvement partner, commissioned by the local authority, who is working with the school on its journey out of special measures. Together with school staff, inspectors discussed the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. In evaluating the school's progress, inspectors observed pupils in tutorials, a morning assembly and 21 lessons, or parts of lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. They also met with groups of middle leaders, pastoral leaders, teachers, support staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors held meetings with all year groups, except for Year 11, who were out of school on work experience. During their observations of teaching and learning, inspectors spoke with pupils about their work. They also spoke with pupils as they moved around the school between lessons and at break and lunchtimes.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school shortly after the end of the autumn term 2016. Working with the local authority, governors appointed a temporary consultant executive headteacher and an acting headteacher to oversee the implementation of the school's improvement plan. The acting headteacher's post was made permanent in April 2017. Over the spring and summer terms 2017, the new leadership team was established and a number of new teaching staff were appointed. The plans to convert the school to academy status are yet to be concluded.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

After a period of considerable uncertainty, and significant leadership and staffing changes, you and other senior leaders have now established a clear framework of improvement to begin steering the school on its journey out of special measures. Planned actions are appropriate and closely linked to the improvement priorities identified at the previous inspection.

Although many of the planned changes are at an early stage of implementation, there are some encouraging signs of progress. For example, pupils', as yet unvalidated, GCSE English and mathematics examination outcomes in summer 2017 are much better than early predictions suggested. They also much better than the

outcomes seen in previous years. This is as a result of the swift action taken by new senior leaders and subject teams. It is notable too that aspects of the outcomes for students in the sixth form are also showing some early signs of improvement.

In our discussions, we agreed that this was an important step in the right direction for the school but you and other senior leaders know that there is more work to be done. This is to ensure that pupils across the school, from their different starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make the progress they should.

You and other senior leaders have secured a plan for improvement that is crystal clear. High expectations of the performance of staff and pupils are a central feature of day-to-day life in school. In meetings, staff told inspectors that they now feel more involved in the decisions taken and understand the urgency of the school's journey to further improvement. It is undeniable that, together with other senior leaders, you have done a sterling job in winning the hearts and minds of the whole school team.

You are right to ensure that senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are regular and accurate in identifying what teachers are doing well and what they need to do to improve. You have also prioritised the development of a new whole-school assessment model. It is right that this takes appropriate account of new curriculum changes and of the need to avoid any unnecessary addition to teachers' workload.

You and your senior team are working closely with middle leaders to ensure that the associated assessment information is used to plan lessons to meet pupils' different aptitudes, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and students in the sixth form.

The revised systems are helping leaders and managers to better understand the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, across subjects, groups of pupils and key stages. Subject teams are now better placed to support the sharing of good practice and to introduce individual programmes of professional development for staff who need extra help to improve aspects of teaching.

Subject leaders told inspectors that they are more confident about leading improvement in their own areas. While they know they are accountable for pupils' progress, they said they feel better supported, trusted, valued and ready to respond to the challenges ahead.

As the new improvement strategies become more consistently applied across subjects, you know there is scope to further refine targets to ensure that they are consistently, and sharply, focused on raising standards for all pupil groups.

Inspectors' evidence confirmed that governors are fulfilling an important role in challenging and holding you to account for pupils' progress. In our discussions, we agreed that this challenge could be made even stronger by linking a named governor to specific improvement priorities.

You have taken steps to ensure that pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding spending is evaluated. This is so that you have a better understanding of the interventions that are working and what needs to be changed. However, this information is yet to be shared, systematically, with governors and published, as a matter of routine, on the school's website.

We agreed that a culture of safeguarding is well established across the school. You and your team have effective systems in place to keep children safe. The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are up to date. Staff are vigilant and clear about their responsibilities to protect pupils in their care. Governors make sure they play their part in sustaining the high profile of safeguarding matters. This is evidenced through meetings and in the routine checks governors make to ensure that the recruitment processes for new staff are compliant and safe.

You and other senior leaders are strengthening links with external partners. For example, in hosting placements for trainee teachers in subjects where you are confident that there is effective support available within your departments. The school is also working with a local university teacher training provider to develop and test out a 'preparing to teach' programme. This is focused on training teaching assistants who are aspiring to become qualified teachers in English, mathematics and science.

You and your leadership team have continued to make appropriate preparations for the proposed conversion to academy status. However, the process has taken much longer than anticipated. This is because of delays outside of the school's and the local authority's control.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The leadership team has a clear plan for improving the quality of teaching and learning, across subjects and for all pupils. In collaboration with middle leaders and teaching staff, a working party has been established to devise and trial a new system for evaluating and improving the quality of this aspect of the school's work.

Middle leaders say they feel well supported in monitoring the performance of their teams. There are early signs that the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. However, there is still more to be done to make sure all teachers have consistently high expectations in their lessons. You and other leaders are fully aware of the need

to focus on ensuring that all pupil groups, including students in the sixth form, are challenged to do as well as they can.

Through senior leaders' observations of teaching and learning, you know that not enough staff make regular checks on pupils' learning in lessons. We agreed that such checks are important to ensure that work is set at the right level, for pupils of different abilities and to address any misconceptions quickly so that no time is wasted. This omission was a common feature of the less effective teaching inspectors saw during their time in the school.

In considering how well teachers use assessment information to plan for pupils' learning, we spoke about the school's new and simplified assessment model. Staff explained to me how the model is based on recent changes to the GCSE grading system. The assessment information gathered is focused on giving teachers a better understanding of pupils' in-year progress. This is to help them to ensure that learning plans are focused on meeting pupils' needs from their different starting points. However, the new model is at an early stage of implementation. Its success will be measured at the first checking point timetabled for the end of the autumn term.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also under review. In our discussions, your special educational needs coordinator confirmed the recent completion of her specialist training. She explained how this training is supporting her leadership of the working party undertaking the review. Early plans for change aim to improve the way information about pupils' needs is shared with subject teachers across the school. The working party will focus on helping teachers to better understand how they can plan appropriately, to meet the learning needs of this group of pupils and so accelerate the progress they make.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You and your senior leaders have rightly raised the expectations of pupils' behaviour across the school. The revised behaviour policy is very clear about the implications of unacceptable conduct. It is also right that the policy gives high priority to celebrating the positive behaviour exhibited by the majority of pupils in the school.

The day-to-day school environment is typically calm and orderly. There is a high staff presence at the start and end of the day and at break and lunchtimes. Senior leaders are timetabled to assist staff, if required, including in lessons.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and there is always someone to go to if they have a problem. You explained to me how the high visibility jackets duty staff now wear are a result of a survey of pupils' opinions. Pupils made the suggestion as a means of identifying staff members quickly if they need to raise a

concern. School records show that when the few incidences of unacceptable behaviour arise, senior staff take swift action and ensure parents are kept informed.

Overall, pupils' attendance remained below the national average last year. To address this, the new leadership team has strengthened absence follow-up procedures. An attendance officer has recently been appointed. The low attendance rate and high persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are yet to improve significantly.

Pupils are polite and generally respond well to adults in school. They told inspectors that they felt behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. Working relationships between staff and pupils are typically positive and mutually respectful.

Although most pupils behave well in lessons, inspectors observed a few incidents of low-level disruption to learning in a few of the lessons they visited. This was mainly linked to the extent of pupils' interest in the tasks they were set at the time. For example, when some work set was too easy, or tasks were not explained well, time was wasted.

We discussed the strategies school leaders are putting in place to reduce fixed-term exclusion rates, in particular to address the high number of disadvantaged pupils temporarily excluded. You explained a variety of new programmes aimed at getting previously excluded pupils back into learning and helping them to continue with their studies.

While many of the new systems are at an early stage of implementation, inspectors noted strong pastoral support for pupils across the school, including counselling and support for concerns related to mental health issues.

Outcomes for pupils

In 2016, by the end of key stage 4 pupils did not make the progress expected of them across a range of subjects, in particular in mathematics, English and science. Disadvantaged pupils' progress overall was significantly below the progress of other, non-disadvantaged, pupils nationally.

There are early signs that pupils are beginning to make better progress, but the variations between key stages, subjects and groups of pupils remain. For example, you and your senior leaders know that the differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others is not reducing quickly enough and that boys make better progress than girls in mathematics. You also know that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making the progress they should

The unvalidated GCSE examination outcomes, in summer 2017, suggest that pupils' attainment in English and mathematics has improved significantly from the previous

year. While this is a positive step forward, you agreed with me that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils, from their different starting points, achieve their full potential.

With a focus on continuous improvement, extra support with reading and writing is planned for Year 7 pupils who joined the school with below-average literacy skills. This work is underway but it is at an early stage of implementation.

In the sixth form, students are making better progress and more of them are achieving the highest grades. Disadvantaged students' progress has improved across all A-level routes and, in particular, across applied general courses.

External support

The local authority has taken steps to ensure that a wide range of appropriate support was secured following the inspection in July 2016. For example, they worked with governors to appoint a temporary executive headteacher, supported the recruitment of the new senior leadership team and arranged professional development for subject leaders. Work continues with other schools to identify and share good practice. The foundations for rapid improvement are being established but new strategies are at an early stage of implementation.