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Mrs Lorna Leventhal
Principal
Weston Favell Academy
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Northamptonshire, NN3 3EZ

Dear Principal

Special measures monitoring inspection of Weston Favell Academy

Following my visit with Rachel Tordoff, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Claire Shepherd, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 17–18 October 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 November 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership by:
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance provide effective oversight and make certain that improvement happens at the appropriate pace and that this improvement is sustained
 - ensuring that the support to the school from the trust is of good enough quality and is of sufficient quantity to make the positive difference needed
 - ensuring that the school's use of the pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding is efficiently monitored and addresses the needs of eligible pupils
 - improving the quality of subject leadership, particularly the leadership of science
 - improving the leadership of the provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of personal development behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing further the proportion of pupils that regularly fail to attend school, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - reducing further the proportion of pupils that are excluded from school, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - pupils' underperformance in science is immediately addressed by improving the quality of subject leadership and teaching
 - pupils' underperformance in geography and in history is immediately addressed by improving the quality of teaching and providing high-quality support to the very new leaders of these subject areas
 - the most able pupils achieve at the same levels as the most able pupils do nationally
 - more disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as the other pupils with the same starting points
 - more pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve at the levels of which they are capable.
- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - teachers use the information about pupils' starting points to plan lessons that provide sufficient support and challenge for different groups of pupils

- there is a rapid reduction in the variability and quality of teaching, within subjects and across subject areas
- teachers use a range of strategies, including effective questioning, to probe and extend pupils' thinking, particularly the most able pupils.
- Improve the quality of the 16 to 19 study programmes by making sure that:
 - effective careers information and guidance are in place so that students move successfully to the next steps in their learning, employment or training
 - the curriculum more suitably meets the needs of the students within this school community
 - students achieve at the levels of which they are capable.

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 17 to 18 October 2017

Evidence

Inspectors held meetings with: the principal; senior leaders; subject and pastoral leaders; the special education needs coordinator; the leader responsible for careers advice and guidance; leaders who oversee the support that disadvantaged pupils receive; a selection of staff; and the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector met with members of the trust, including the director of secondary improvement and the regional education director. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 33 lessons, during which they spoke with pupils and looked at their books. Most of these visits to lessons took place jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors met with selected pupils formally, and spoke with pupils informally during breaktime and lunchtime, when they also observed pupils' behaviour. An inspector spoke with a representative of one of the alternative providers that the school works with. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents relating to the school's work. These included the school's own self-evaluation and improvement plan, as well as documentation relating to attendance, behaviour, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The lead inspector also scrutinised the external reviews of governance and of the school's use of pupil premium funding. The lead inspector checked the school's single central record.

Context

A new principal started at the school in September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have taken appropriate action to respond to the findings of the previous inspection. These actions have led to an improvement across many aspects of the school's provision, particularly in pupils' achievement. However, there remain inconsistencies in both leadership and the quality of teaching, which have led to continued underachievement in some subjects.

The new principal has acted quickly to raise the expectations of all members of the school community, particularly in relation to pupils' achievement, including that of the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has made her high expectations in relation to pupils' attendance and progress clear for 'every pupil, every subject, every grade'.

The principal has an accurate understanding of where there has been an improvement in the quality of the school's provision. She knows the areas where further improvement is necessary, including those areas where weak classroom practice and subject leadership lead to continued pupil underachievement, particularly for the most able.

There are now clearer lines of accountability, particularly among the senior leaders, in relation to pupils' outcomes and behaviour, and the monitoring of the quality of teaching. Staff appreciate this greater clarity in relation to which senior leaders have responsibility for the different aspects of the school's provision.

Senior leaders now regularly check the quality of teaching through visiting lessons. On occasions, they conduct these visits with subject leaders. These visits ensure that senior leaders have a precise understanding of where classroom practice is effective, and where it is not. Where it is not, they now provide appropriate support to help the teachers to improve their practice. This includes support that the trust offers, as well as support that is available from other local schools.

Senior leaders have provided support for subject leaders to develop their leadership skills, including through leadership development programmes that other local schools provide. This has resulted in an improvement in the quality of leadership at all levels. However, there are still some areas of the school's provision where leadership remains weak, including in the leadership of some subjects.

Senior leaders have recognised that the curriculum at key stage 4 does not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to study subjects that prepare them well for their next steps. Recent curriculum changes have ensured that pupils are studying subjects that are more appropriate to their needs and interests.

Since the previous inspection, the trust has appointed a director of secondary improvement to check on the progress of the actions that leaders have taken to improve the quality of the school's provision. Through his regular meetings with the principal, the director provides appropriate levels of challenge. He also provides targeted support, particularly through the allocation of trust subject advisers, who work closely with the school's senior and subject leaders.

These regular meetings have ensured that the trust board, in its role of governance, has a sharp understanding of the actions that the school's leaders have taken to improve the quality of the school's provision. Trust board members have correctly identified those aspects of the school's provision that need to improve further, including those areas where rapid improvement is necessary.

The trust board commissioned an external review of the school's governance. This review considered the role of the academy achievement council (AAC). This body, which the trust board has created to support the principal, is not responsible for the school's governance. Rather, it has certain, limited functions delegated to it by the body legally responsible for the governance of the school, which is the trust board itself. The trust board has considered the recommendations of this review, including its own governance role, and its relationship with the AAC. Beyond this, it is currently not clear how the external review will develop further the work of the trust board in fulfilling its governance duties towards the school.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding has taken place. This review identified a lack of sharpness in senior leaders' evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's use of this additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders rightly recognise that their current evaluation of the school's use of this funding continues to lack the necessary sharpness. It is too early to measure the impact of the recent action that they have taken to resolve this.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- The actions that leaders have taken since the previous inspection have led to improvements in the quality of leadership and of teaching.
- The principal has a precise understanding of the quality of the school's provision, and of where further improvement is necessary.
- Senior leaders know where pupils now make better progress. They are aware of those subjects in which pupils still do not make sufficient progress.
- Pupils made average progress in their GCSE outcomes in 2017. Previously, for some years, overall progress at GCSE had been well below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are absent from the school, including those who are regularly absent, has reduced.
- The proportion of pupils who miss lessons due to sanctions for their behaviour, including exclusions from school, has reduced significantly.
- Leaders have quickly reviewed the key stage 4 and 5 curriculum to ensure that the subjects on offer better meet pupils' and students' needs and interests.
- The progress that disadvantaged pupils make has begun to improve, due to the improved support that these pupils receive.
- The school engages well with the support that the trust and local schools offer.
- The trust board understands the school's current strengths and weaknesses.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- While improving, the quality of teaching remains variable across the school.
- There continues to be weak leadership in some aspects of the school's provision, including in the leadership of several subjects.
- Leaders' evaluation of the impact of their use of additional government funding is not sharp enough.
- The achievement of the most able pupils is not improving rapidly enough in a range of subjects across different year groups.
- The progress that current Year 10 pupils are making in English is less strong than the progress pupils make in this subject in other year groups.
- While the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving, still too many are absent from school, including on a regular basis. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not improved.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who miss lessons due to their behaviour is too high.
- Sixth form students' progress continues to be variable across the range of

academic and work-related subjects that they study.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

While the quality of teaching is improving, resulting in improving outcomes across a range of subjects, there remains a variability in classroom practice across different subjects, particularly in science and geography.

Where learning is effective, teachers have begun to use information about pupils' prior learning and their prior attainment to plan lessons. This enables them to set work that has appropriate levels of challenge. As a result, pupils engage well with their learning, and make the progress that they should. Teachers ask questions well to check pupils' understanding, and provide pupils with appropriate support.

However, not all teachers use information about pupils' prior learning to plan suitably challenging work. Where this is the case, pupils do not receive work that enables them to make the progress that they should. Furthermore, not all teachers check pupils' understanding well enough to ensure that they are secure in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous inspection, there has been a reduction in pupils' overall absence, including in the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. This is due to the closer checks that senior leaders now undertake on pupils' attendance and the support that they provide pupils who struggle to attend school regularly. While improving, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are absent from school remains too high. The absence of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not reduced since the last inspection.

Senior leaders have reviewed the strategies to sanction pupils who misbehave. They have done this to reduce the occasions when such sanctions take pupils out of their lessons and interrupt their opportunities to make progress. Furthermore, pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour now receive closer support from staff. As a result, the number of occasions when pupils are not in lessons due to receiving a behaviour sanction, including exclusion from school, has significantly reduced. However, within this reduced number, the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains too high.

Pupils conduct themselves well around the school site at the beginning and end of the school day, between lessons and during social times. High levels of staff supervision at these times ensure that pupils behave well, and that there are strong relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff. Pupils behave well in lessons, even when the work that they receive lacks sufficient challenge.

Outcomes for pupils

There has been an improvement in pupils' outcomes since the previous inspection. This is due to the close attention that senior leaders have paid to improving teaching, and the support that leaders at all levels have put in place to help the pupils who have previously fallen behind to catch up. This improvement in pupils' achievement, however, is not consistent across the school.

For some time, pupils' progress in their GCSE studies has been well below average. Furthermore, their progress has been below the government's floor standard, which stipulates the minimum level of progress that pupils should make in their GCSE studies. In 2017, however, Year 11 pupils made average progress across a range of subjects at GCSE. Pupils made strong progress in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. Pupils did not make sufficient progress in some subjects, however, including in history, geography and science.

There has been an improvement in the progress that disadvantaged pupils make across a range of subjects. In 2017, for example, Year 11 disadvantaged pupils made average progress in their GCSE studies. Prior to 2017, the progress that disadvantaged pupils made was well below average. The school's performance information indicates that current disadvantaged pupils are making better progress at key stage 3, particularly in English and mathematics. These improved outcomes are due to teachers' raised awareness of disadvantaged pupils' achievement and the extra support that these pupils receive.

The school's performance information indicates that pupils are making better progress at key stages 3 and 4. This includes those pupils who are of middle and lower prior attainment, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, there are still too few most able pupils in key stages 3 and 4 who make the progress that they should.

16 to 19 study programmes

Leaders have taken appropriate action to resolve the shortfalls that inspectors identified in the school's sixth form curriculum. They have increased the number of work-related subjects that students can study, to ensure that the sixth form provision better meets their needs.

Leaders have ensured that students receive effective careers advice and guidance. This has led to greater numbers of students continuing with their studies throughout the two-year sixth form programme of study. It has also ensured that students make successful next steps into places of higher education, training or employment at the end of Year 13.

Students' outcomes in sixth form continue to be mixed. While in 2017 there was an improvement in pupils' attainment at A level, the progress that students made was

variable. Across a wide range of subjects, too few students made the progress that they should.

External support

As well as engaging with support programmes that the trust offers the school, senior leaders have worked closely with local schools and other external educational organisations. For example, the school has worked with a local teaching school to provide subject leaders with leadership training and to assist senior leaders in reviewing the school's curriculum for key stages 4 and 5. In working with other schools, senior leaders have been able to learn from the practice of others, check on the quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' learning, and ensure that their evaluation of the quality of the school's provision is accurate.