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Mr Phil Mellen
Principal
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Dear Mr Mellen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cedar Mount Academy

Following my visit with David Hampson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 May 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2015. 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 newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables students to achieve well by ensuring that:
 - work set matches the needs and abilities of all groups of students and is adjusted appropriately if they are not making good progress
 - there are consistently high expectations of what students can achieve
 - all students are engaged in their learning at all times and they are making good progress
 - teachers' marking provides students with subject-specific advice to help them to improve their learning and staff require students to respond to the advice
 - questioning is used skilfully and is appropriately challenging to check the understanding of all students in order to ensure good progress
 - opportunities for students to develop their reading and writing skills in subjects other than English are swiftly developed and students have opportunities to apply their mathematical skills effectively across a range of subjects
 - the work of teaching assistants is checked carefully to ensure that they are supporting students in making good progress.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety by developing effective practices to:
 - urgently reduce the number of students absent from the academy, including those regularly absent, so their safety is assured and overall attendance across the academy is at least average
 - make sure all students arrive at the academy and to their classes on time
 - eradicate persistent low-level disruption and instances of misbehaviour so that learning improves
 - ensure that all students take pride in their work
 - ensure that the academy's procedures for the management of students' behaviour are consistently applied by all staff.
- Rapidly improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that governors meet all of their statutory duties
 - ensuring that there are effective programmes for the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding that impact well on the behaviour and attitudes of all students

- eradicating inadequate teaching and improving that which requires improvement
- ensuring continuity of staffing for all students
- developing effective plans for improvement that have sharply focused actions with precise measures of success
- holding teachers and leaders to account through effective performance management
- ensuring that the impact of actions to help disadvantaged students is checked thoroughly to ensure that these students are making good progress in all subjects and attend well
- ensuring that all leaders, especially subject leaders, focus effectively on the progress and behaviour of all groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs
- making sure that all leaders check the quality of teaching accurately and link it securely to students' progress
- ensuring that subject leaders take swift action to ensure that there is consistent and effective use of academy policies so that students' behaviour and the quality of teaching improve
- developing effectively students' skills in reading, writing and mathematics across a wide range of subjects
- ensuring that governors and sponsors hold the academy rigorously to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

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 academy'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 fourth monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 May 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of the school improvement board and the chief executive of the trust. They observed teaching and learning and spoke with teachers. They spent time observing how pupils behaved around the school.

Context

New heads of department in science, art and modern foreign languages took up their posts in September 2016. The senior leadership team and other key posts have remained stable since the expanded leadership teams were created at the end of the last academic year. A new chief executive of the trust has been in post since January 2017. Discussions are currently taking place between the trust and the regional schools commissioner in relation to the future of the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the 11 months since his appointment, the principal has provided the strong and incisive leadership that this school has so urgently required. He has made a significant difference to the quality of education that pupils receive at Cedar Mount Academy. Under his leadership, senior leaders have grown in confidence. He has empowered them to lead their respective areas more effectively. The reports that senior leaders present to the school improvement board demonstrate the impact that their actions are having on outcomes for pupils. There is now a much greater clarity about lines of accountability across the school.

Since the principal's arrival, the school has made strong progress towards the removal of special measures. It is a great shame that very little progress was made during the first year following the last full inspection. This was very much a wasted year and the trust accepts responsibility for this. The new chief executive of the trust has a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. He brings with him a sense of urgency and commitment to improving outcomes for pupils in this community.

Staff morale is high. Leaders, teachers and other adults in the school demonstrate a genuine and tangible commitment to their pupils. Staff who joined the school at the start of the year are particularly positive. They feel supported by leaders who they think have a clear sense of direction. They all recognise the continuing improvement in pupils' behaviour.

Pupils are much more positive about the quality of their education. In contrast to

previous monitoring inspections, pupils who spoke to the inspectors say that they would now recommend their school to other pupils. This reflects the growing sense of allegiance and pride that exists in the school community. The principal has worked hard to develop this and the change in culture is evident.

A cornerstone of the principal's vision is to genuinely enrich pupils' lives during their time in the school. There are numerous examples that show how this is happening. A change to the timings of the school day means that pupils are now able to attend clubs at lunchtime to support their wider personal development. Pupils can choose from an extensive range of activities, including languages, sport, film, dance, art, choir, debating and chess.

Leaders are determined that pupils should have many opportunities to broaden their horizons. In the last year, pupils have been involved in over 50 enrichment events. These have included visits to theatres, museums and Media City; visits and performances from authors; music workshops; and sports and science challenges. Many of these extra-curricular events have been joint activities with the trust's special school and primary schools.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching throughout the school has continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders believe that nearly 70% of teaching across the school is typically good or better. A range of inspection evidence indicates that this is an accurate assessment. Senior leaders have a clear grasp of the areas of strength and remaining weaknesses in teaching. Leaders are able to demonstrate the impact of the systems that they use to improve teaching, including effective quality assurance procedures and personalised professional development. Support and development for newly qualified teachers is particularly impressive. For example, one recently qualified teacher is not only a strong classroom practitioner but also an effective subject leader.

This year has seen a much more stable staffing situation, which has contributed significantly to the overall improvement in the quality of teaching. Most classes are now taught by permanent teachers. However, a small number of groups are still taught by supply teachers, particularly in the mathematics and science departments. This means that in these subjects there remains a wide variability in the quality of teaching. The English department has a full complement of staff and teaching is generally strong in this subject. Pupils benefit from particularly effective teaching in the physical education and humanities departments. For example, an inspector saw evidence of how very well prepared Year 11 pupils were for their forthcoming examinations in history, geography and religious education.

Underpinning the high-quality teaching are the excellent relationships that exist between pupils and staff. Pupils who have had a raw deal in the school over the last

few years are so pleased to have teachers who genuinely care about them and want them to succeed. They relish the high expectations that their teachers have of them and rise to the challenges that they are set. Many teachers use questioning skilfully to probe and develop pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Inspectors were struck by how well leaders, teachers and other adults know their pupils, and the particular challenges and difficulties that they may face. Staff have a detailed knowledge and understanding of pupils' circumstances and they are willing to go the extra mile to help them to achieve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Mutually respectful relationships between staff and pupils contribute significantly to the vast improvement in pupils' behaviour in lessons. In most classes, pupils display positive attitudes to learning. This is a very different picture to the one seen in the earlier monitoring inspections. In the small number of cases where learning continues to be disrupted, it is linked to poor application of the behaviour policy, weaker teaching or the quality of supply staff.

There has been some improvement in the way that pupils behave when not in lessons, but leaders know that it is still not as good as it should be. While many pupils socialise pleasantly during break and lunchtime, the behaviour of some is still too rowdy, which means that the atmosphere around the school is not calm enough during these times. Movement between lessons and at the end of break and lunchtime remains problematic. Leaders have tried to improve the situation, for example, with one-way rules, but the design of the building does not help the situation. There are many staff around during these times but some of them, particularly those who are inexperienced, have little or no impact at all on the behaviour of the pupils.

Staff and pupils alike speak of the improvements in behaviour over the last year. Many believe that the principal's strong leadership has been a significant factor in this. There has been a notable reduction in the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions and detentions. The internal exclusion unit (IEU) is managed effectively and is a sufficient deterrent for the majority of pupils. Although the number of pupils spending time in the IEU has decreased, there is a small but significant number who spend too much of their time there.

Attendance and persistent absence figures continue to improve. The overall attendance figure at the end of this year is likely to be 1% higher than last year. This is a significant increase, and follows a similar increase in the previous year. There has been a 5% improvement in the persistent absence figures in each of the last two years, which is credit to the work staff have done to encourage pupils to attend school regularly. While these overall figures are to be commended, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains a concern.

The school's separate inclusion unit, The Bridge, is a real success story. Effective leadership of this facility has enabled very vulnerable and/or challenging pupils to benefit from high-quality personalised provision. Leaders presented inspectors with clear evidence of the impact of The Bridge, including marked improvements in attendance and reductions in exclusions. Case studies were presented of pupils who have successfully returned to their mainstream classes following time in The Bridge. Most importantly, those pupils are now making progress with their school work. Particularly impressive is how this facility has enabled leaders to bring pupils back to the school who were placed in off-site alternative provision where they were making little progress towards gaining qualifications.

Outcomes for pupils

It is extremely disappointing that the expected improvement in Year 11 outcomes did not happen in 2016. It transpires that the predictions were not reliable as staff felt under pressure to present the best possible outcome for pupils rather than an accurate assessment. There has been a complete change of ethos in the school in this area. The principal is confident that the assessment information is now accurate and reliable. This information indicates that there will be some improvement in outcomes for the current Year 11 but leaders accept that this may not be enough to ensure that the school meets the government's current floor standards. However, achievement information for the current Year 10 and 9 shows a more significant level of improvement.

Assessment information indicates that the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are diminishing, but not at a quick enough rate. Pupils currently on roll who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making better progress than in recent years. This area of the school is led very effectively.

Leaders recognise how badly the current Year 11 have been affected by failings in the school over recent years. Staff are working tirelessly to ensure that these pupils achieve their potential. 'Project 11' has been running since September. This involves extra lessons for Year 11 pupils every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, and Saturday revision sessions. Pupils have responded positively to this and are appreciative of their teachers' efforts and support.

Inspectors saw more evidence in this inspection of teachers challenging the most able to attain high grades. In the English department, leaders have decided to create some single-sex top sets to help the most able pupils make the best possible progress. The impact of this could be seen in a single-sex Year 9 English group where the girls were studying 'Pride and prejudice'. Their responses to this challenging text were impressive and they were clearly enjoying studying it. One girl explained how confident she felt in this group without having boys around to judge

her. Inspectors also saw examples of how some teachers were challenging key stage 3 pupils to reach high standards. For example, in a Year 8 citizenship lesson it was clear that pupils were used to exploring difficult topics such as devolution.

Leaders understand that strong literacy skills underpin success across the curriculum. There is a clear and coordinated literacy strategy which has focused this year on the identified need to improve pupils' vocabulary. A vocabulary enrichment programme has had a very positive impact with Year 11 pupils. This will be rolled out to other year groups in the next academic year. A team of specialists within the trust provides effective bespoke interventions for identified pupils.

Over recent years, there has been a significant improvement in the number of pupils who progress to further education, training or employment. Last year this figure increased from 85% to 92%, and indications are that it will be 96% at the end of this year. Staff provide very effective personalised support to pupils to ensure that they can progress successfully to appropriate courses after Year 11.

External support

The new chief executive of the trust is very 'hands-on' and spends a considerable amount of time in the school. The principal values his involvement and support. Staff across the school have benefited from the bespoke training and support programme which was agreed with the trust's teaching school.