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Mr Alan Fletcher
Principal
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Queen Mary Road
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Dear Mr Fletcher

Special measures monitoring inspection of King's Lynn Academy

Following my visit with John Wilson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016. 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.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 interim executive board, the chief executive of the Eastern Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - trust leaders and governors hold school leaders to account for raising standards
 - leaders evaluate the quality of teaching rigorously through a sharp analysis of pupils' progress
 - middle leaders are enabled to swiftly tackle weaker teaching and the underperformance of pupils in their subject areas
 - school priorities are understood by all staff, so that support provided for disadvantaged pupils enables them to achieve well
 - provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good so that they can learn more effectively.
- Improve the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment across the school by:
 - equipping teachers to use assessment information to plan learning that is challenging, allows pupils to deepen their understanding and demonstrates higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially the most able pupils
 - making sure that teachers use the agreed school feedback protocols consistently
 - ensuring that teachers intervene quickly and effectively to correct pupils' misconceptions.
- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - raising the expectations of pupils' reading and writing across the curriculum
 - ensuring that pupils develop their mastery of mathematical concepts before moving on to new learning.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 December 2017 to 13 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and your team of senior leaders, middle leaders, two groups of pupils, a representative of the academy trust and the chair of the interim executive board. Together with your senior leaders, we observed pupils at work in lessons and scrutinised their work in books.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, you have been appointed to lead the school as its substantive principal. Four teachers have left and a new leader of modern languages has joined the school. The number of pupils on roll has risen significantly. Two classrooms have been developed to form a teaching base and social area for disadvantaged pupils. The interim executive board has met monthly to review the school's improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You continue to lead your staff effectively and ensure that they remain focused on making the necessary improvements. You and the trust leaders share a clear vision for the school's development and are ambitious for its future. Significant improvements have been made since the last monitoring inspection. However, you and the trust realise that much more now needs to be done to ensure that the school is fully prepared for its next inspection.

Your monitoring of teaching clearly identifies what staff do well and what they need to do to increase their effectiveness. Weak teaching has been challenged effectively. You have taken decisive action where the quality of teaching has not been good enough. Our joint observations of teaching confirmed that senior leaders are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and report upon the effect it is having on pupils' progress. Not all of your middle leaders are engaged in addressing weaker teaching or the underperformance of pupils in their subjects. Some are new in post this year. A few need further training and support to improve their leadership.

There is a heightened focus on the education and welfare of disadvantaged pupils. One of your middle leaders has overseen effectively the development of a new 'passion with purpose' base, enabling a small team of staff to provide these pupils with high-quality support and one-to-one interventions. Early signs show that this is helping to get disadvantaged pupils back into school, retain them in learning and improve their progress in English and mathematics. Your revised plan for the spending of the pupil premium this year is in place but does not identify the costs of

each initiative.

Your staff recognise the need for improvement and are working collectively to raise achievement. They know the backgrounds and particular needs of pupils in their care well, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. However, they do not provide enough tasks in lessons suited to their different needs and abilities. We found little evidence in our observations of lessons of how teachers use the information they have about these pupils to plan learning for them. The tailored support for disadvantaged pupils in the 'passion with purpose' base is not being reinforced often enough in day-to-day teaching in classrooms.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Our observations confirmed your view that teaching is improving, and is becoming more consistent. This is due to recent training and because teachers are being held more accountable for the progress made by pupils in their care. You have responded promptly to the concerns I raised in the last monitoring inspection about the quality of work in books. The quality of presentation is improving because expectations are higher and senior leaders are monitoring how effectively teachers manage this. The quality of teachers' marking and feedback is improving. Pupils value teachers' comments about 'what went well', and what would be 'even better if'. These agreed procedures are becoming firmly established. More needs to be done to sharpen the 'even better if' comments so that pupils understand fully what they need to do to improve their work.

Our observations also confirmed your view that teachers are becoming more confident in managing learning in small groups. Pupils respond well to this and to the one-to-one support provided by staff to show them what to do and correct any misconceptions they have. The most able pupils in the top sets for English and mathematics generally learn well and make good progress because suitably challenging work is set for them. This is not the case in mixed-ability classes because not all teachers use assessment information well enough to plan learning for pupils of different abilities. Those teachers who do include different tasks in their planning do not always teach them. Consequently, the most able pupils in mixed-ability classes are not always challenged enough to enable them to deepen their understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

At the school's last inspection, pupils' behaviour was found to be good, and was not identified as an area for improvement. Since then, you have shared your concerns about a small minority of pupils, mostly in key stage 3, that do not behave well enough. This is undermining the positive behaviour shown by most of your pupils in lessons and at break- and lunchtimes.

Senior leaders know who these pupils are. They have recognised that previous

procedures to remove them from lessons and refer them to the reflection room have had little effect in modifying their behaviour. Actions to improve this behaviour have led to an increase in recorded incidents, and a spike in the proportion of pupils excluded from school. You and the trust acknowledge that this needs resolving promptly if the school is to maintain its trend of improvement. Planning is under way to implement revised procedures next term for managing this group of pupils who regularly display the most challenging behaviour.

Below-average attendance noted at the time of the last monitoring inspection has not improved. A recent bout of local flu resulted in significant absence of pupils and some staff. Your records show that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is too high. This remains a significant barrier to raising their achievement.

Your staff continue to maintain good-quality pastoral care for pupils. They know pupils well and ensure their well-being by keeping in regular touch with them and their families. When asked, pupils who met with us confirmed that the school is a safe, welcoming place to be. Procedures for rewarding and celebrating good behaviour and attitudes are well established and valued highly by pupils. Those pupils who met with inspectors did a great job in representing the views of others in the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional results in last summer's examinations show some improvement. Although overall progress 8 measures remained low, results show that the intensive actions taken to ensure that pupils were better prepared for examinations worked. Overall progress rates of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities were better in 2017 compared with the previous year. A higher proportion of pupils attained pass grades in GCSE English and mathematics.

Recent mock examination results in English and mathematics confirm that improvements are being maintained. Your records show that over half of the pupils currently in Year 11 achieved at least a pass grade in English, and close to half of them did so in mathematics. Similarly, a much higher proportion of pupils in Year 10 attained pass grades in mock English and mathematics examinations. This supports your views that school staff are raising achievement, and that outcomes will improve further in 2018.

My previous monitoring inspection noted that pupils' progress in lessons varied, according to the quality of teaching. This has not been fully resolved. Our findings did not support your views and that of recent reports commissioned by the trust that teaching is mostly good. Good-quality teaching is clearly evident across a range of subjects, but in general, much of it still requires further improvement. When asked, pupils said that they feel they are making better progress now, mainly because behaviour has improved and there are fewer changes in staffing. They

shared with us those subjects and lessons where they feel they are not achieving what they are capable of attaining.

We found several examples of higher expectations in pupils' writing in English and in a range of foundation subjects. Mathematics teaching is developing pupils' mastery of mathematical concepts. Raising expectations of pupils' reading requires further development. Initiatives to encourage pupils' reading, including accelerated reader, book clubs and increased use of the library are working. However, not all less able pupils are developing their literacy skills by reading regularly or reading for pleasure.

External support

You shared with me a wide range of evidence to show that trust leaders are holding you and your staff to account for making improvements. Following the review of governance earlier this year, which led to the establishment of an interim executive board, governance is operating much more effectively. Members of the board are highly experienced and knowledgeable and understand what is needed to strengthen the school's work and increase its overall effectiveness. Regular meetings enable the board to review the effect of your work. Minutes of meetings show that they are asking you and your team challenging questions about the effect of actions listed in the rapid improvement plan.

Trust staff have visited this term to quality assure the school's work and confirm that the information you share with trust leaders is accurate. However, the trust is not routinely monitoring the progress made in resolving the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Without this monitoring they cannot form an accurate judgement of the capacity of leaders to improve the school.

An external review of the school's work commissioned by the trust identifies what is done well and what needs improving. It does not provide leaders with a thorough explanation of the reasons why outcomes remain low and current progress varies, even though teaching was found to be mostly good. The review also looked further at how effectively the needs of disadvantaged pupils are met. The findings have not been shared with leaders at this stage.

The findings of an external review of the English department carried out by the local authority have been welcomed and accepted by you and your leader of English. The review has helped to validate many of the actions taken so far to raise achievement in English and makes a series of recommendations to improve the teaching of literature and strengthen provision in key stage 3.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that procedures being developed to improve the unacceptable behaviour of a small minority of pupils are implemented promptly in 2018.