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Andrew Wakefield
Principal
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Dear Mr Wakefield

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Edge Academy

Following my visit to your school on 9 April 2019, 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 June 2018. 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 strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2018.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring, without delay, that all safeguarding procedures are adhered to by all staff consistently
 - implementing an effective approach to assessment which provides accurate, validated judgements
 - developing and implementing an effective system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching
 - implementing fully the planned changes to SEN provision, ensuring that the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are met
 - inducting and supporting new leaders so they have a demonstrable impact, beyond their own classes, on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
 - ensuring that funding for disadvantaged pupils is carefully targeted and accounted for, and enables them to make rapid progress.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - developing effective strategies for behaviour management which are consistently applied by all staff
 - significantly reducing the rate of exclusion
 - staff seeking pupils' views about their current placement, well-being and progress, then using this information to inform pupils' next steps
 - ensuring that pupils receive effective careers information, advice and guidance so they can make informed decisions about their future
 - ensuring that the provision for pupils' SMSC development is well planned and embedded across the wider curriculum
 - making learning activities more relevant and engaging so pupils are inspired to learn and remain focused.
- Significantly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that all staff have the highest possible expectations of all groups of pupils
 - providing a structured programme of training and support for staff to help them develop their teaching skills

- ensuring that all staff use assessment information well to determine pupils' starting points and plan effective learning tasks which enable pupils to make good progress over time
 - identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' basic literacy skills through a carefully planned programme
 - ensuring that teachers set work that provides pupils, particularly the most able, with an appropriate degree of challenge to enable them to achieve their potential.
- Ensure that all pupils attend school regularly and arrive to school on time.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium is recommended in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 April 2019

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), a group of staff, a group of pupils and the vice-chair of the governing body. The inspector spoke on the telephone to a representative, commissioned by the local authority, from a service that provides school improvement support and advice. The inspection included a deeper focus on safeguarding due to the concerns raised at the last monitoring inspection. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and careers information, advice and guidance were not examined in any detail.

Context

Since December 2018, one vice-principal and two other teachers have left the school. A new head of mathematics was appointed to a permanent position in February 2019. A second mathematics teacher, who started at the beginning of the spring term, is on secondment from another school. Two new support staff have been appointed. You have not yet been successful in appointing a science teacher. There has been redistribution of some leadership responsibilities as a result of the reduction in the size of the leadership team.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have made good strides in addressing several of the areas for development since the last monitoring visit. Your determination, and that of your senior leadership team, to make The Edge a place where pupils develop positive attitudes to education, is unwavering. You have harnessed the skills of individual leaders to create a cohesive leadership team that shares the same aspirational vision for improvement. All leaders have a clear understanding about what needs to be done to secure further improvement. Each is playing an instrumental part in starting to turn the vision into reality. Parental feedback at the most recent parents' evening indicates that parents and carers are pleased with the improvements at the school.

You continue to commission various external audits and reviews to fully understand some of the school's existing weaknesses. This term, leaders' attention has been sharply focused on trying to eradicate shortfalls in safeguarding arrangements and improve pupils' behaviour. Steady improvements in both of these areas are evident. Leaders adapt and refine school improvement plans to take into account the findings of external reviews. This means that you remain focused on addressing the most pressing priorities, and at an increasing pace. However, you recognise that there is still a lot to be accomplished. Despite this, you and other leaders are optimistic, and show a steely resolve to get the job done.

Leaders' relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is gradually bringing about positive change. When this does not happen quickly enough, they take decisive action. However, the introduction of new initiatives has been somewhat hampered by further staffing upheaval. You recognise the need to share and revisit key messages and expectations to ensure that everyone has a common understanding about what good teaching involves. Staff say that they feel supported well by leaders and feedback from staff indicates that morale is improving.

Arrangements for safeguarding have been strengthened. The vice-principal took over responsibility as the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) at the start of this term. Leaders have responded rapidly to weaknesses in safeguarding provision by introducing several changes to processes and procedures. This has been complemented by additional staff training, with 16 staff having now completed DSL training. Staff are more vigilant than before and are logging all relevant concerns. However, it is still the case, occasionally, that the quality of recording lacks clarity. When a concern is reported, leaders take swift action to deal with it, and, where necessary, involve relevant external agencies to protect pupils from harm.

All staff have completed positive handling training and any records of restraint are now recorded properly. Leaders have adapted the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum to make it more responsive to pupils' needs and the school's local context. Leaders reinforce PSHE work through weekly assemblies relating to themes such as resilience, morals and mental health. This supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.

Provision for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has strengthened. Pupil information profiles, which stipulate each pupil's learning requirements, are more specific, therefore teaching strategies align better with pupils' needs. Appropriate training for staff has helped to build their knowledge and enable them to provide better support for pupils with SEND. However, leaders still do not know enough about the effectiveness of some interventions for pupils with SEND because they have not yet been involved in any monitoring. This is planned for the near future.

The post Ofsted improvement board (POIB) continues to meet monthly. It oversees the strategic direction of the school and holds leaders rigorously to account. Governors have high, yet realistic expectations of what can be achieved. The POIB carefully considers the school's plans for improvement and challenges leaders' thinking. In one example, a leader's action plan needed some refinement, and the POIB provided constructive feedback and requested that amendments were made. Leaders value this critical, yet supportive approach. This is helping the school to move in the right direction.

Preparations continue with respect to the move to sponsored academy status. You have held meetings with a potential sponsor with expertise in the field of alternative provision, although nothing has yet been formalised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The wide variations in the quality of teaching have begun to diminish. There has been a significant push on raising teachers' expectations about what pupils can, and should, achieve. The impact of this is clearly evident. This has been accomplished, in part, by increasing the time senior leaders spend teaching. This is enabling more experienced colleagues to role-model good practice. During the inspection, I visited many lessons and found that pupils were beginning to engage more readily with their learning. Teaching was generally more stimulating, and this helped to maintain pupils' engagement.

Taking into account assessment information, most teachers now set work that is better matched to pupils' abilities. Where teaching is particularly effective, teachers set initial, manageable tasks that quickly engage pupils. For example, in a key stage 4 English lesson, pupils spent a few minutes unscrambling anagrams of linguistic terms. This task immediately involved most pupils and served as a useful precursor to the main part of the lesson. Because of these positive changes to teaching, more pupils experience success. In one lesson, the teacher challenged pupils to interpret an unseen poem, 'On Aging' by Maya Angelou. They did this well and were proud of their achievements.

In some subjects, curriculum leaders have modified course content to make it more appealing to pupils. For example, in design technology, electronics has replaced a less popular unit of work. I witnessed pupils engrossed in a task to create a music speaker. They made effective design choices and developed their soldering skills well. Teachers are also making better use of classroom resources to support learning. In a mathematics lesson, pupils used cubes to help them draw plan views of front and side elevations of solid shapes. This helped them to complete the task more easily.

Leaders have placed significant emphasis on the teaching of reading. A small number of staff attended two-day training in the teaching of phonics. Leaders are successfully promoting the message that 'everyone is a teacher of reading'. Focused reading interventions for pupils are having a real impact. Leaders have embarked on a strategy to raise the profile of reading throughout the school. Every week, a member of staff shares their 'recommended read'. However, it is too early to determine the effectiveness of this strategy on promoting pupils' interest in reading for pleasure.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since my last visit, leaders have invested heavily in staff training to implement the school's revised behaviour policy. This is based on the ethos of 'catching people being good'. The impact of this training is clearly evident. Staff more regularly use positive language to encourage good behaviour, and show persistence in terms of 'relentless routines'. Leaders explained that the next step will focus on staff holding restorative conversations with pupils following an incident of negative behaviour. Pupils, staff and the POIB all assert that behaviour in the school is improving. Inspection findings support their views.

Pupils show better attitudes towards their work. Staff are now more consistent in their application of the school's behaviour policy. For example, almost without exception, staff challenge pupils who swear or who make derogatory remarks. They make their expectations clear that this type of behaviour is unacceptable. Most teachers deal with this in an unobtrusive way, avoiding confrontation and quickly re-engaging pupils in their learning after they have been spoken to.

At the last monitoring inspection, internal truancy – pupils removing themselves from classrooms or just not turning up for a lesson – was a significant problem. This term, leaders have made a concerted effort to try and address internal truancy. You took a tough stance, using exclusion as the main consequence and deterrent. Initially, this resulted in a significant spike in the number of fixed-term exclusions. However, the rate has already started to drop and continues to fall week-on-week. Pupils are now less likely to leave classrooms without permission, although there are still a significant minority that do.

Leaders now track pupils' attendance with great precision, and take appropriate action when issues are identified. However, the rate of attendance has dipped slightly this term compared to last term, partly due to the increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Internal truancy still accounts for too much of the recorded absence. Leaders' actions and more pupils attending for breakfast have helped to bring about significant improvements to pupils' punctuality.

Despite behaviour improving, a core of mainly Year 11 pupils with deeply entrenched adverse behaviours continue to present a real challenge to staff. It is a concern that several pupils unashamedly smoke outside, on the school premises, during breaktime. While this is not condoned by staff, leaders are not doing enough to curb smoking on the school site. Not only is this illegal, it is harmful to pupils' health and unhelpful for impressionable younger pupils to witness.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes were not evaluated during this inspection. However, leaders and the POIB know that outcomes are not yet good enough, although they are beginning to improve for some pupils. The exception to this is in relation to progress

in reading, where an increasing number of pupils are making more rapid gains in achievement. The school's assessment system is now firmly in place and used with greater confidence by all staff. Pupils' books indicate that some pupils are achieving particularly well, but others are not. In the latter case, this is often as a result of poor attendance or internal truancy.

External support

The partner commissioned by the local authority to offer school improvement services continues to provide effective support for school leaders. You and other leaders engage very well with those offering external support. You take heed of advice and quickly respond to any recommendations. This helps to maintain the momentum of improvement. You especially value, and have benefited enormously from, the support of an experienced headteacher from REACH Alternative Provision.