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Mr Phil Mellen
Executive principal
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Dear Mr Mellen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cedar Mount Academy

Following my visit with Stephen Ruddy, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 July 2016, 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy 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 happy to recommend that the school seeks to 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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 July 2016

Evidence

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

Context

In June 2016 the principal left the school and an executive principal was appointed. He has reorganised the senior leadership structure. Two middle leaders have been promoted to the position of associate assistant vice-principal. New heads of science and modern foreign languages have been appointed and will take up their posts in September 2016. Two other teachers will be joining the science department at the start of the academic year, one of these as a lead teacher. Two newly qualified teachers will also be joining the school, one in the humanities department and the other in the personal, social, health and religious education department. At the time of the inspection, five teaching vacancies remained unfilled.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The newly appointed executive principal has provided the strong, incisive leadership that the school requires as it moves towards its next section 5 inspection. Although he has been in post for only a very short time, his actions have already had an impact. The executive principal was already carrying out this leadership role across two primary schools in the trust and was a member of the school's strategic improvement board. He has brought consistency and continuity, along with new ideas for improving leadership throughout the school.

At the heart of his very clear vision for the school is effective transition from key stage 2 to 3. Leaders are working in partnership with their colleagues in the trust primary schools on a range of areas such as curriculum planning and behaviour management strategies. This collaborative approach is reflected in the new weekly bulletin which is distributed to parents of all pupils in the schools. This bulletin also reflects the importance that the executive principal puts on communicating effectively with parents. As well as being informative, it has a real focus on celebrating the achievements of pupils.

The newly created executive leadership team is providing the right balance between clear strategic leadership and driving improvements 'on the ground'. A new structure of expanded leadership teams in the school, involving senior and middle leaders, has been created to develop and sustain leadership capacity across the

school. Although the impact of these new teams cannot be evaluated until next term, leaders say that they feel more empowered to carry out their roles effectively under this clearer strategic direction. Evidence from this inspection already indicates that leaders are working collaboratively with a sharp focus on what impact their actions have on pupils' achievement.

The school has moved on considerably since the last monitoring inspection, but leaders are acutely aware of the challenges they still face. A high priority is to fill the remaining teaching vacancies before the start of the new school year. This is a particular concern in design and technology. At the time of this inspection, there are no qualified specialist teachers in post to teach this subject in September 2016. Leaders are aware that science has been a particular concern this year. They have produced a detailed action plan to bring about improvements in this subject and intend to monitor closely the impact of new leadership and staffing in the department from September 2016.

A recent survey shows that staff continue to feel positive about the way they are supported by senior leaders when dealing with challenging behaviour. They also feel that the actions of senior leaders have led to a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour since January 2016, and that the behaviour management system is clear and fair. Pupils who spoke to inspectors also feel that behaviour has improved and that the behaviour management system introduced in January has really made a difference.

The school improvement board has been further strengthened by new members, including a new chair. The board provides clear strategic direction and the right balance of challenge and support to leaders in school. Members of the board are quite rightly focused on ensuring that leadership skills are developed and sustained throughout the school. The minutes of the monthly meetings of the board show how they ask searching questions to ensure that leaders' actions are having an impact.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching throughout the academy has continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders now judge over half of teaching to be good or better. Inspectors saw evidence of this improvement and it is clear that more pupils are benefiting from strong teaching.

Responsibilities in the new leadership structure reflect the high priority that is now given to ensuring that all pupils receive high-quality teaching. The vast majority of teachers are very keen to improve their practice. They are open and responsive to training and feedback. Pupils who spoke to inspectors believe that teaching has improved. They also feel supported by their teachers. As one pupil explained, 'Teachers really want us to succeed'. The majority of teachers have very strong relationships with their pupils. This is a significant factor in pupils' improved attitudes to learning.

Variation in the quality of teaching remains, but more teachers are using questioning effectively to check and probe pupils' understanding. Some teachers are giving pupils opportunities to develop their skills in longer pieces of writing but this is not consistent. Some teachers give high priority to the development of literacy and oracy skills, but again this is not consistent across the school.

Senior leaders know that too many teachers are still not challenging the most able pupils enough to help them attain the highest possible grades. This is particularly evident when looking at pupils' work. A work scrutiny carried out jointly with senior leaders showed that teachers' different expectations continue to influence the quality of pupils' work. Teachers are also inconsistent in the way they follow the school's literacy marking policy. Leaders know that while teachers are now marking work more frequently, the impact of this on pupils' progress varies.

Concerns remain about variations in the effectiveness of teaching assistants. Senior leaders strongly recommend that teachers should involve teaching assistants in their planning and preparation of lessons, but this is clearly not happening enough. Consequently, on too many occasions teaching assistants have little impact in the classroom and on pupils' progress. The special educational needs coordinator has trained staff very recently on the effective use of teaching assistants and this remains a key focus for next term.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Senior leaders responded swiftly to the concerns raised at the last monitoring inspection about the need for the separate inclusion unit to be opened as soon as possible. In the short time the unit has been opened, there has already been significant improvement in the attendance and behaviour of the small number of pupils who are taught there. Senior leaders have a clear action plan for the development of this facility in the autumn term with an increased number of pupils set to benefit from this personalised provision.

Pupils' behaviour during lessons continues to improve and the majority of pupils now have very positive attitudes to learning. Where this is not the case, it is often linked to weaker teaching. Pupils say that science is the subject where most disruption to learning takes place.

There has been only a slight improvement in the way pupils behave when they are moving around the school. The behaviour of pupils at the end of break and lunchtime and between lessons is still too rowdy. Leaders have worked hard to raise expectations of what is acceptable behaviour and this has had significant impact in the classroom. The challenge now is to improve the culture outside of classrooms so that it becomes more calm and orderly, and pupils are more respectful of staff and each other.

Punctuality to school continues to improve. The number of pupils who are late to lessons remains a concern, however. Teachers do not consistently apply the sanction that exists for lateness to lessons and consequently some pupils choose to arrive up to 15 minutes late.

Overall attendance and persistent absence figures continue to improve considerably but, because they were so low at the start of the year, they are on track to remain below national averages at the end of the year. Leaders are aware that disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils in Year 10 have particularly low attendance. They are focusing their efforts on getting these pupils to attend school regularly. Leaders are also working much more closely with their colleagues in the partner primary schools on attendance and behaviour issues.

Outcomes for pupils

The strategic leadership of pupils' performance has improved since the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders are now able to provide clear and convincing evidence that pupils' achievement at the end of this year should represent an improvement on last year. Overall attainment and progress figures are set to be higher than in 2015. Information about pupils' performance also indicates that this improvement is set to continue in 2017.

Leaders believe that the predictions for examination outcomes are accurate as they are based on a second set of mock examinations that took place in March, which were marked and checked by professionals external to the school. Leaders indicated that information about pupils' progress for all year groups was being used more effectively by senior and middle leaders.

Gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing but leaders know that this is not happening quickly enough. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making better progress but, again, leaders are keen to ensure that gaps between their achievement and that of their peers close at a faster rate. More effective use of information about pupils' performance is helping leaders to target their actions more effectively at two other key groups of pupils: boys and the most able.

External support

The trust responded decisively to the findings of the last monitoring inspection, particularly in relation to the concerns raised about leadership. It has ensured that there is now strong leadership, both strategically and from day to day, as the school moves towards and beyond its next full inspection. Specialist leaders in education are continuing to support staff, particularly middle leaders. The executive principal is working with the trust's teaching school to plan a bespoke training and support package to commence in September 2016. Staff in the English and mathematics

departments have also benefited from working collaboratively with their colleagues in the trust's partner primary schools.