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Mr Richard Cahill
Hinckley Academy and John Cleveland Sixth Form Centre
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Leicestershire
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Dear Mr Cahill

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hinckley Academy and John Cleveland Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit with Jane Burton and Gulbanu Kader, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 26–27 November 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 May 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 action 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 board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children’s Services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Stevens
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

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

- Make safeguarding effective through ensuring that there is an appropriate system for monitoring pupils' attendance which includes rigorous, timely checks on absences.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management on raising pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that governors have the skills to hold senior leaders to account with more rigour
 - creating an effective strategy for the use and evaluation of the additional funding the school receives to improve the attendance and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring the accuracy of progress data so that leaders, governors and teachers are better informed about the next steps in pupils' learning
 - strengthening the monitoring of pupils' attendance by including rigorous checks on absence at an earlier stage so that actions can be taken to improve attendance for all pupils
 - implementing the findings of the recently completed review of the curriculum so that it is fit for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
 - making sure that all members of staff are consistent in their application of school policies, including managing pupil behaviour and feedback to pupils.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities to secure good progress and good behaviour in lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide them with work that is appropriately challenging
 - making sure that all teachers use information about pupils' attainment and progress to provide work that is at the right level
 - ensuring that teachers check pupils' understanding regularly in lessons so that learning matches their needs and they make good progress
 - providing more bespoke professional development for staff, including the sharing of best practice, so that teachers can increase rates of achievement for all pupils across the curriculum, especially for boys and disadvantaged pupils.

- Make sure that all pupils understand what constitutes bullying, so they are able to recognise it if it occurs and report it appropriately to staff.
- Ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of British values so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

An external review of the school's 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 second monitoring inspection on 26 November 2019 to 27 November 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and other senior leaders. Meetings were held with subject leaders and the leaders for behaviour and attitudes and personal development. Inspectors discussed the leadership of pupils with SEND. Inspectors held discussions with three groups of pupils. They also spoke with pupils during lessons and social time. They met with groups of teaching and support staff. Inspectors made short visits to lessons in a range of subjects in key stages 3, 4 and 5. They looked at samples of pupils' work in Years 9 and 10. Inspectors visited tutor time sessions and one assembly.

Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including a selection of school policies, records of behaviour and attendance, and records relating to pupils with SEND. Inspectors reviewed documentation about the school's curriculum planning. Safeguarding procedures and record keeping were scrutinised. The lead inspector met with two representatives from the school's board of trustees. A telephone interview was also held with the chief executive officer of the Futures Trust, which is set to become the school's sponsor. The lead inspector considered the 55 responses to the school's survey of parents' views.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, senior leadership has remained stable. Leaders appointed a new assistant headteacher to oversee the school's work on literacy, numeracy and communication. This leader also oversees the implementation of the school's new Year 7 curriculum. Subject leadership is also stable. Presently the school has subject specialists in all subject areas. A new coordinator for pupils with SEND has been appointed recently. Over the past year, nine new members of staff have joined the school, including two teaching assistants. Five members of staff have left the school. The school is currently operating without a permanent school business manager.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders continue to tackle weaknesses in the quality of education identified at the last inspection. They have expanded opportunities for professional learning. Expectations of pupils are higher than at the last inspection. Leaders have improved the behaviour and attitudes of pupils. Staff and pupils have a clear understanding of the school's behaviour policy. The number of incidents of low-level disruption has reduced since the last inspection. Inspectors saw few occurrences of low-level disruption in their visits to lessons. The number of pupils withdrawn from lessons

for poor behaviour has reduced. The proportion of pupils receiving a fixed-term exclusion on one or more occasion has also reduced. Levels are now below the national average. The improved quality of pupils' classwork, including the presentation of it, reflects pupils' positive attitudes.

Leaders have shared their view of successful curriculum planning with staff. Leaders' implementation of the school's curriculum in most subjects shows that subject leaders have considered the order and content of the topics they teach. Teachers introduce many topics using enquiry questions. Pupils' confidence in answering these, however, is more varied. Inspectors noted this in science, for example.

Leaders' strategies to improve the quality of education are bringing about improvements. The school's system to ensure that teachers plan learning to meet the needs of all pupils continues to strengthen. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. Some teachers use this knowledge enthusiastically to inspire and engage pupils in their learning. Inspectors noted this in history and music, for example. In a history lesson, pupils enjoyed learning about the Spanish Armada because of the way the teacher adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils in the class. In a music lesson, the teacher's high expectations ensured that pupils' performance skills in singing improved, alongside their understanding of chord sequences.

Leaders recognise that the quality of education is improving in some subjects more quickly than in others. Inspectors' visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work showed variations in the quality of learning between subjects and year groups. Pupils told inspectors that their enjoyment of learning depends on which teacher they have. Teachers' questioning of pupils needs to improve. In mathematics, science and engineering, pupils require more precise guidance on how to reach higher levels of achievement.

Leaders have continued to review the curriculum at all key stages. They recognise the importance of ensuring that all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum. Leaders are aware of the government's target to increase the proportion of pupils who follow the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) suite of subjects. They have ensured that those pupils who wish to follow these subjects are able to do so. The proportion of pupils taking EBacc subjects is increasing.

Leaders are ambitious to ensure that pupils in Year 7 have a positive start to their time at school. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum for Year 7. Following research and consultation with local primary schools, leaders launched a new curriculum in September 2019. Known as 'The Edge' (explore, dream, grow and exceed), this curriculum is designed to develop pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and communication. It also maintains pupils' breadth of learning across all national curriculum subjects. Leaders aim to ensure that pupils' experience of learning builds on what they already know and can do in primary school. This initiative is in its

infancy. It is too soon to see the full impact on pupils' confidence and their levels of achievement.

Subject leaders are providing pupils with high levels of support and guidance about how to prepare for examinations in key stage 4. This guidance was evident in an assembly for Year 11 pupils about English, mathematics and science. Pupils appreciate the extra support they receive. They say it is helping them to overcome gaps in their knowledge left by a poor quality of education in the past. The impact of this support is not yet reflected, however, in pupils' levels of achievement at the end of key stage 4. In 2019, pupils' achievement across a range of subjects was weak, particularly in English and some optional subjects.

Pupils' understanding of British values is strong. They are able to explain these values with confidence. Most pupils exhibit these values in their conduct around the school. The leader for personal development has ensured that there is a comprehensive programme in place. There is a wide variety of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities available. Most pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they value these.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal leads a stable and unified team of leaders. The changes they have introduced to the school's culture have made a positive difference, particularly in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils. Leaders continue to promote the school's 'TRUE' values (trust, respect, unite and excel). Leaders have ensured that pupils' aspirations and opportunities for personal development are central to the work of the school. One pupil in Year 7 who wrote a speech for an open evening said, 'I am looking forward to my future at Hinckley Academy and beyond. There are some dream jobs that I would like when I grow up. I think that this school will help me get there.'

Following the review of governance in the previous school year, governors have a stronger understanding of their strategic role. This includes the importance of holding senior leaders to account. Governors are well informed. They know the school's strengths and development priorities. They are aware that pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 4 is not as strong as they would wish. They are committed to seeing rapid improvements in the quality of education and pupils' outcomes. Governors have also used their skills and expertise in helping to shape the new curriculum for pupils in Year 7.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and are well looked after. Leaders have been successful in securing higher levels of attendance. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has decreased since the last inspection. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who are often absent from school has increased slightly. Leaders know that they must persist

with the approaches they use to improve these pupils' attendance, including involving the school's welfare officer when appropriate.

Staff are alert to the potential risks faced by pupils, particularly the most vulnerable. School records reflect that leaders work well with parents and carers and other agencies to protect children. For example, the 'endeavour programme' has enabled local schools to work closely with the police. Leaders have been proactive in helping pupils to learn about risks in the local community. These risks include online safety, knife crime, gang culture and substance misuse. The 'words over weapons' presentation was recently delivered to all pupils about the impact of knife crime, for example.

Leaders have ensured that all pupils know about the different types of bullying. The appointment of a bullying ambassador has had a positive impact. This role has helped pupils to recognise and report instances of bullying to staff. Most pupils report that they now have greater confidence that staff will deal with issues than in the past. Leaders recognise there is more to do to ensure that all parents understand the school's positive work in tackling bullying.

Senior leaders are working closely with subject leaders. They have strengthened line management and quality assurance processes. Subject leaders are benefiting from the support of the prospective trust in planning the curriculum. Subject leaders who spoke to inspectors reported that they are well supported by senior leaders. Leaders have yet to secure consistency, however, from all subject leaders.

The leader for the pupil premium funding has a better oversight of the progress made by disadvantaged pupils than at the time of the previous inspection. External reviews have supported leaders to have a clear understanding of pupils' barriers to learning. The implementation of the school's 'disadvantaged first' policy and pupil passports is helping staff and pupils to overcome these barriers. Leaders know there is much more to do to secure higher levels of achievement.

The recently appointed coordinator for pupils with SEND has made a positive start. She has galvanised her team to ensure that the curriculum for pupils with SEND is adapted appropriately to meet their needs. Work to ensure effective relationships with parents has strengthened. She has maintained the inclusive ethos.

Despite recent challenging circumstances, the morale of staff is generally positive. They are committed to seeing improvements that will bring about the future success of the school. Staff show a distinct loyalty to the school. One member of staff described morale in the school as being like the 'Dunkirk spirit'. Leaders are mindful of staff workload. At the start of the year, leaders implemented a new assessment system using electronic mark books. Staff reported to inspectors that this approach has helped to reduce some elements of workload.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' actions to improve standards of behaviour and pupils' attitudes are proving successful. The conduct of pupils around the school is calm and orderly. Pupils say that they are happy to be at school. Instances of classroom disruption are low. Rates of exclusions have significantly decreased.
- Leaders actions to enhance pupils' personal development are effective. Pupils have a good understanding of British values. Leaders also ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of the potential risks they may face in the local community.
- Governors' oversight of the strengths and weaknesses of the school continues to strengthen. They have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is effective across all subjects or in all year groups. The quality of education remains variable. Inspectors' visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed pupils' views that the quality of learning varies between subjects and year groups and depends upon which teacher they have.
- The curriculum has lacked ambition and has not enabled pupils to achieve as well as they should. Senior leaders have not ensured that all curriculum leaders have improved their curriculum so that it enables all pupils to succeed.
- The quality of teachers' questioning does not consistently ensure that pupils' understanding is secure.
- Leaders have not yet ensured that additional funding is used effectively to raise the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils. While improving, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils by the end of key stage 4 is well below that of all pupils nationally.

External support

Leaders benefit from the continued support of the Futures Academy Trust. There are effective links with the President Kennedy Teaching School Alliance. Leaders, including subject leaders, have accessed several professional development opportunities through this partnership.

Leaders with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils have completed two external reviews. The recommendations from these reviews are being implemented.